

BITTER



SUGAR

by CHEDDI JAGAN

Strange that an article like sugar, so sweet and necessary to human existence should have occasioned such crimes and bloodshed.

—(Dr. Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery.)

BITTER SUGAR

Sugar, we are told, is the 'sheet anchor' of the economy of British Guiana. Destroy it and the Government will not be able to carry on, and thousands of people will suffer. Herein lies at one and the same time the strength and power of the imperialists, and the weakness of our economy.

Sugar has indeed played a major role in the agricultural economy of British Guiana, so much so that the history of B.G. can truly be said to be a history of sugar. This history abounds with many instances of looting, bloodshed and murder. As late as 1948, at Pln. Enmore, 5 workers were killed and several others severely injured. Even a Government appointed Committee (Enmore Enquiry Commission) had to admit that:

"we are however of the opinion that the evidence has established that after the first few shots there was firing which went beyond the requirement of the situation with the result that Pooran noticeably and some others received bullets when in actual flight."

Agricultural policy has always been determined not so much "in conjunction with" sugar but "after" sugar. Sugar has indeed been "king". This has been possible because the sugar plantation owners are mostly absentee British Imperialists, who are operating in B.G. three companies (English registered) Booker Bros., McConnell & Co. Ltd., Davson & Co. Ltd., and the Demerara Co. Ltd.

SUGAR IMPERIALISM

Bookers is the Symbol of British Imperialism in B.G. It is represented in all phases of the economic life, so much so that B.G. is sometimes colloquially referred to as Booker's Guiana. It controls a greater part of the sugar estates, and has a dominant position in commerce. Not too long ago it made tremendous profits by selling its extensive wood grant and saw-milling interests to the Colonial Development Corporation. It has shares in the largest Cattle Company, the Rupununi Development Co., the Chairman of which is a Booker's director, Mr. H. G. Seaford. Sir F. J. Seaford, now a Booker's London director was a one-time director of the Demerara Bauxite Company in addition to this key position in Bookers. These along with other British Caribbean Sugar imperialists are strongly buttressed in the powerful West Indian Committee in London. As such, they are and indeed have always been, the real rulers of our country. Recall the appointment of Mr. F. J. (now Sir) Seaford to the Legislative and Executive Councils after his defeat at the General elections in 1947. Even a Labour Secretary of State for the Colonies, the right honourable A. Creech-Jones could not resist the powerful lobbying of the West Indian Committee.

Cover picture shows:—Armed police during the time of the sugar estates strike and Enmore shooting in 1948.

Hon. F. Morrish of Sandbach Parker and Demerara Co. Ltd. replaced Sir F. J. Seaford, when the latter left for the London office of Booker Bros., McConnell and Co. Ltd. Hon. W. A. Macnie, managing-director of the Sugar Producers Association and one-time high Government-official, subsequently replaced Mr. Morrish.

There are some 'honourable' members of the Legislative Council, nominated and elected who have direct and indirect interests in the sugar industry. Others are psychologically wedded in many cases for opportunist considerations. Hons. W. Raatgever and C. V. Wight are shareholders of Schonard & Verailles Estates Ltd., C. V. Wight's father Mr. P. C. Wight, is a director of Enmore Estates Ltd. Nominated Member Hon. G. H. Smellie is a shareholder of Enmore Estates Ltd., and a onetime director of Davson & Co., Ltd. He is also a director of Garnett & Co. Ltd. About 40 per cent of the shares of Garnett are held by Davson & Co. Ltd. Another nominated Member, Hon. Cyril Farnum is Secretary of Humphrey & Co. Ltd. Mr. R. G. Humphrey is a director of Resouvenir Estates Ltd.

Aside from direct representation in the Legislative Council, the sugar interest have their representatives in strategic positions in various statutory boards and committees—Drainage Board, Central Board of Health, Transport and Harbours etc. It is significant that on my election to the Legislative Council in 1947, I was not placed on any Board or Committee, while other freshmen Legislators like myself found themselves in four, five and six. When I protested, I was placed on one Committee The Medical Advisory Committee, while the late Mr. J. I. D'Aguiar whom I defeated continued to hold many important positions.

This political power permits the sugar imperialists to determine major questions of policy in their own interest for their direct and indirect financial gain. Once the policy is decided, inevitably it is put into effect. The dividing line between policy-making and administration is indeed very obscure. The fact is that Governorships and high administrative positions in the Colonial Empire are merely BIG jobs for British civil servants. Those who do not toe the line simply do not get the big jobs. In British Guiana the civil servants have sense enough to know that if they are to get promotions, they cannot 'buck' against "king" sugar. Actually many ex-civil servants hold prominent positions directly and indirectly associated with sugar.

SUGAR AND LABOUR

The age-old headache of the sugar planters has been the problem of securing and maintaining an adequate and surplus labour force to provide themselves with cheap labour. African slavery provided the answer at the beginning. After its abolition, resort was made to indentured immigrants (5 years contract slaves) from Madeira, China, and India. Unfortunately for the sugar imperialists, the indenture system ceased in 1917. Later attempts at resettling Assyrians and displaced Jews failed. Other means, therefore, particularly after 1917 had to be found not only to maintain the necessary and surplus

labour force in and around sugar estates, but also to circumvent the drift away from the plantations.

These measures have taken different forms—lack of agricultural diversification, land idleness, inadequate drainage and irrigation, price fixing of wages and farmers produce, etc. One—control of malaria—has even taken on an humanitarian garb. Malaria coupled with malnutrition was to a very great extent responsible for the decimation of the population.

The Annual Report of British Guiana for 1949 stated:

"between 1838 when slavery was abolished and 1917 when the last batch of immigrants arrived, British Guiana had obtained more than 430,000 colonists from India, Africa, Madiera, China and other places. Even making allowances for immigrants returning to their native lands, it might be assumed that they would have maintained their numbers. Yet the population of 309,000 in 1911 had become 307,000 in 1921".

If the sugar workers were to remain alive—dead men produce no profits—some means has to be found to wipe out the scourge of malaria. It was in the light of this fact that Dr. Giglioli was appointed as Medical Adviser to the Sugar Producers Association and Honorary Malariologist. He devoted much valuable time and study in combating this dreadful disease. In the 1946 Annual Report of 1946, he wrote:

"Approximately 60 per cent. of its school children between 1938 and 1945 showed evidence of chronic malaria; the birth rate was low and the death rate high; in most years the number of deaths exceeded the number of births. Infant mortality in malarial years ranged from 235 to 255 per thousand live births (1938-44). D.D.T. was applied for the first time in July, 1945, and has been repeated twice since; in 1946 the number of births was twice as great as in any of the seven years preceding the application of D.D.T. the births-to-deaths ratio rose to 234 births for every 100 deaths; the infant mortality dropped to 96 per live births, and, in the last malariometric survey, only 18 per cent. of the school children still showed evidence of chronic malaria".

LAND HUNGER

Closely associated with the non-diversification of agriculture, is the problem of land hunger. British Guiana has an extensive area of approximately 83,000 square miles, almost the size of Great Britain, with a density of population of about 5 persons per square mile, as compared with 1,246 for Barbados and 613 for Grenada. Yet the farmers are land hungry. The last Census of 1946 disclosed that the average farmer had 3½ acres of land—and this badly drained and irrigated. Compare this with the 15 to 20 acres of well drained and irrigated lands deemed by the experts as necessary for earning a decent livelihood.

The fact that land has not been available accounts for our various food shortages. In November 1951, it was estimated that there were only 3½ lbs. of beef per month per individual for Georgetown and environs. Local cooking oil and fats have been in short supply for a good many years with the exception of the period immediately after the 1950 floods. The shortage became so acute in 1948-49 that about \$70,000 of precious Canadian hard currency had to be spent for the importation of Canadian Soya-bean oil. In 1952, large quantities of oil had to be imported from Holland and Trinidad. Had land been readily available to the farmers during the past years, thousands of them could easily have cultivated at least three to five acres each in coconuts. Coconut shortage means not only curtailment of oil, but also of copra meal production. Shortage of oil and copra meal in turn effects the soap, pig, and dairy industries.

The West India Circular of July 1951 reported:

Subsequent to the shortage of crude coconut oil in the Colony, Mr. G. F. Messervy has called for applications for the purchase of soap from the West Indies to augment locally manufactured supplies.

It is important to note that the area of all the West Indian Islands from which come our oil and soap, is only a small part of the extensive land area of British Guiana. Total British Caribbean area is 122,000 square miles, of British Honduras is 9,000, and British Guiana 83,000 square miles.

In the Essequibo Coast which is sometimes referred to as the "blighted" coast, most of the farmers have only a few acres of land. And this is mostly grown in rice. Even at the large Government rice estates at Anna Regina, no land is made available to permit tenant farmers to grow catch or permanent crops. Besides there is very little opportunity for employment outside the limited number of jobs available with the Public Works Department. Since rice is a seasonal crop, it means in effect that a majority of the people in Essequibo are not fully occupied for the greater part of the year. This is the main reason for the depressed state of affairs on the Essequibo Coast, and not as is so often alleged, the breaking down of the Essequibo sugar estates. As will be shown later, it is "sugar" which is really responsible for the blighted condition not only in the Essequibo, but in other parts of the country as well. So far as the sugar planters are concerned there must be no prosperity outside of sugar estates, lest their labour force be attracted away.

LAND IDLENESS

While there is land hunger, large tracts of land are kept idle or not properly utilized. The sugar imperialists control directly about 170,000 acres of land.

The figures under freehold and leasehold for the separate sugar estates are as follows:

Name of Estate	Freehold (acres)	Leasehold (acres)
Skeldon	4,686	5,035
Port Mourant	2,833	12,740
Albion	4,878	7,591
Rose Hall	13,290	166
Lochaber	625	195
Providence	4,219	3,150
Blairmont	4,200	6,729
Bath	3,619	3,731
Enmore	3,135	10,440
Lusignan	2,180	7,870
Resouvenir Estates Ltd.	2,377	6,367
Ogle	2,933	4,345
Ruimveldt	565	525
Houston	1,145	1,050
Diamond	11,816	3,543
Versailles & Schonard	6,230	2,011
Wales	4,604	3,093
Leonora	2,708	4,943
Uitvlugt	6,162	5,349
TOTAL	82,205	88,873

For all the Sugar plantations, acreage tax figures for 1950 showed that more than 50 per cent of total land holdings are held uncultivated; that is, land not held under sugar cane, rice, provision and other agricultural produce and pasture. Of these land holdings, only about 80,000 acres are under sugar cane cultivation. Large tracts of land are kept idle. Government acreage tax returns for the first six months of 1948 indicated that for Le Resouvenir Estates, comprising a total area of 8,744 acres, 2395.26 acres or approximately 28 per cent, were returned as waste land, dams and trenches. Much of the area could have been beneficially utilised if made available to workers residing on the estates, and in adjoining villages. Ogle Estates Ltd. consisting of 7,278 acres had 2132 acres or over 33¼ per cent returned as grazing land. A great portion of this so-called grazing land, with only a few heads of cattle could have been more profitably utilised by residents for provision farming and rice cultivation.

This land idleness can be maintained because the low rental charged by Government is only an average of 5 cents per acre for nearly 90,000 acres of land. This policy is pursued in order to force the hungry workers to accept continually poor wages and bad working conditions. In 1951, I introduced a motion which sought to withdraw the leases or alternatively to tax uncultivated lands held by the sugar plantations. When put to the vote, it was defeated.

Why control lands in such large holdings and not beneficially

occupy them? The answer to this question is found in a deliberate restrictive policy to maintain a large surplus labour force around the sugar estates. The farm lands of $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 acre plots given to the workers for farming are just enough to keep them from becoming too disgruntled with their insecurity and low wages; to keep them from migrating during the periods of seasonal unemployment. Too much land must not be given—the policy seems to be—lest the workers become economically self-sufficient, and independent.

It is instructive to note that the Report of the Committee headed by P.W. King, appointed to enquire into "Certain Questions in Connection with Piece Work on Sugar Estates" (Legislative Council Paper 14/2 of 1944) stated:

"that piece workers engaged 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 by non-residents is not known, but that male non-residents worked roughly 3 days per week . . . 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."

LAND CONFISCATION

To force the sugar workers to abandon their more profitable rice and provision farming, in order to provide the sugar estates with more days of work per week, the sugar planters resorted to the confiscation of land. Labour Department figures show the following:

	RICE ACREAGE ALLOTTED	NO. OF PERSONS
1943	11,430	13,053
1946	10,696.25	11,219
1947	9,381.5	10,263

	PROVISIONS ACREAGE ALLOTTED	NO. OF PERSONS
1943	3,445	9,262
1946	2,601.5	5,952
1947	2,546	6,016

Examination of these figures reveals that approximately 2,000 acres of rice land and 1,000 acres of provision land were taken away from the resident workers. A defence of this act as not being a deliberate one, was put up recently in the Legislative Council by Hon. W. Macnie, Managing-Director of the Sugar Producers Association. According to him sugar production was curtailed during the war because of lack of shipping, consequently more land became available for rice and ground provisions. At the end of the war the land was taken back, because sugar production was increased. This appears to be logical reasoning, but only on the surface. Sugar production did not increase at the end of the war. In actual fact, it decreased.

Dr. Benham's Report, "The National Income of British Guiana 1942", states that "the year's production (of sugar) was 192,000

tons. Local sales were 12,554 tons and exports 134,000 tons. . . ." While it is true to say that because of shipping difficulties, export of sugar was curtailed, the total production figure of 192,000 tons, which had only been equalled in 1950 (195,651 tons) does not prove any curtailment of sugar cane production. What happened to the excess of 25,916 tons of sugar which is the difference of total production, (192,000 tons) and total consumption and exported (157,084 tons)?

It was produced in the sense that the sugar canes were sent through the mills and the sugar bearing molasses was dumped into the trenches & canals—the British Government, however paid the sugar capitalists for this so-called 'loss'. Besides, as a result of the food shortage and grow more food campaign, the sugar plantations themselves cultivated 5,717 acres in peas, beans and ground provisions in 1944. A few acres were also planted in rubber. This was given up at the end of the war on the pretext of being non-profitable.

It becomes obvious therefore, that since the sugar production was not increased, and more land became available by the curtailment of cultivation of food and other agricultural crops it was not necessary to take away from the workers approximately 3,000 acres of land. That it is a deliberate policy can be concluded from the King Report quoted above. The Report of the Labour Department of 1948 disclosed:

"except for female resident and non-resident time workers employed in the West Demerara Estates Ltd., and female young persons employed on the East Coast and West Coast Estates Ltd., the average number of days worked per week during 1948 was higher on the estates on the East Bank Demerara than on the estates in the other districts of the Colony. This may be due to the greater dependence on earnings on the East Bank owing to the absence of rice and farm lands in this area."

Since 1947, more lands have been confiscated from the hapless workers.

YEAR	RICE LANDS		PROVISION LANDS	
	PERSONS	ACRES	PERSONS	ACRES
1948	8,912	8,580	5,343	2,151½
1949	8,863	8,562½	5,149	1,960
1950	8,389	8,232	4,394	1,843¼
1951	8,138	7,715	4,129	1,495½

It is interesting to note also that in 1948 the Sugar Planters increased greatly "agistment" fees for cattle, sheep, goats, horses and donkeys. This was meant not primarily to raise money for the sugar planters, but more-so like the Poll and Hut Taxes of Africa, to kill native industry and thereby provide the cheap labour for the sugar estates. It is also meant to give the Sugar-controlled Rupununi Development Company the largest cattle company a big weapon in demanding ever-increasing prices in a beef-hungry country.

This is how the East African Standard puts it about the Poll and Hut Taxes in Kenya:

"We consider that taxation is the only possible method of compell-

ing the native to leave his reserve for the purpose of seeking work. Only in this way can the cost of living be increased for the native, and as we have previously pointed out, it is on this that the supply of labour and the price of labour depends. To raise the rate of wages would not increase, but would diminish the supply of labour. A rise in the rate of wages would enable the hut or poll tax of a family, sub-tribe, or tribe to be earned by fewer external workers

In British Guiana, we do not have such direct taxes, but there are devious ways in arriving at the same results. In fact, it is strongly felt in certain quarters that the Government's policy of switching from freehold to leasehold holdings for Government lands coincided with the end of indentureship and the period when sugar estates were experiencing great difficulties in maintaining their labour force. This was done, it is suggested, because freehold titles provided if not greater security at least greater psychological stimulus for an independent livelihood on the farm in the woods and the forests away from the sugar estates.

DRAINAGE AND IRRIGATION

Closely associated with the problem of land control and land hunger is the major problem of drainage and irrigation.

The Governor, Sir Charles Wooley, speaking on drainage and irrigation in the Legislative Council, during the debates on the draft estimates for 1950, said:

"we have never had levels taken for the whole of our coastal belt, and we have never had a department or sub-department concentrating solely on this work so vital to the biggest problem of all in the coastal belt. We have had consulting engineers and individual's schemes, but there never has been a comprehensive survey on which we could frame more safely schemes of the kind we are embarking upon."

This is indeed an alarming admission after nearly 150 years of British imperialist rule. It may well be asked—whose fault it is, and who has influenced it?

According to the Royal Commission's Report of 1945:

"practically all well drained land is in sugar The areas devoted to rice and pasture are badly drained and abound in large swampy areas, where almost amphibious cattle, sheep and pigs eke out an unusual existence."

Why is this? Because the sugar planters have always determined and controlled drainage and irrigation policy. Sir F. J. Seaford was for a long number of years Chairman of the Drainage Board. He was succeeded by Mr. F. Morrish of the Demerara Co. Ltd., who on his retirement was replaced by Mr. W. Maenic, Managing-Director of the Sugar Producers Association.

These sugar planters control the water conservancies where a very huge water level is maintained so as to provide themselves with cheap irrigation water. Compare irrigation rate of about 95 cents per

acre with charges of \$5 to \$8 proposed by Mr. Hutchinson for the Boeraserie Scheme.

These conservancies are an ever-present source of danger to the farmers in periods of heavy rainfall. In the 1934 floods terrible destruction was caused, when the East Demerara Conservancy dams broke away. In 1950, the dams had to be cut in several places to relieve pressure and prevent breaking.

What about the major schemes?

The Bonasika irrigation Scheme as originally planned was to benefit only about 4,000 acres of land, most of which are in sugar estates.

The Torani Scheme was designed to supply irrigation water to the sugar estates on the Corentyne, and not intended to bring into proper drainage large areas of land in the lower Canje.

It is true that the Government had engaged the services of Mr. F. Hutchinson to advise on drainage and irrigation policy and that thousands of dollars have been voted to carry out preliminary surveys. But it is equally true that the sugar planters had vigorously opposed Mr Hutchinson's comprehensive drainage and irrigation schemes. Mr. Hutchinson and the sugar imperialists did not look upon the problem of drainage and irrigation from the same points of view. For the former with a rapidly increasing population and industrialization in the dim and distant future, thousands of additional well drained and irrigated lands offered the only immediate means of solving the growing unemployment problem and of raising the standard of living. It is a well known fact that because of poor drainage and irrigation year after year there is loss of ground provisions, fruit trees and live stock.

The farmers are year in year out being exhorted to increase their productivity. The financial Secretary's Budget statement for 1951 joined in the preaching. He proclaimed that the "surest means of securing improvement is greater production", and pointed out that according to the Fletcher Committee's Report of the rise of 14 points in the cost of living index which has taken place between 1949 and October 1950, only 4.1 points are due to the increased prices of imported items, while 9.9 are due to the rise in the price of local products". What he did not say was that the floods of early 1950 were mainly responsible. Mr. Mc David must be remembered that it was not lack of production which was responsible for the loss of nearly \$70,000 by the Produce Depot in 1949; but instead unplanned production and distribution and uncontrolled competition for which only the Government is to be blamed. For instance, in 1953 Mr. Gregory, Comptroller of Customs recommended a reduction on the import duties of salt, garlic, onions and split peas and an increase on canned foods—peas, beans, carrots, tomatoes etc. But a Select Committee of the Legislative Council packed with representatives directly and indirectly associated with

the Chamber of Commerce—Macnic, Smellie, John Fernandes and Raatsveer—revised Mr. Gregory's recommendations by increasing the duties on Garlic, onions, salt and split peas and decreasing duties on canned foods as follows:—

Commodity	Gregory's Recommendations		Select Committee's Recommendations	
	Pref.	General	Pref.	General
Garlic & Onions	50c. per 100 lbs.	\$1.00 per 100 lbs.	\$1.00 per 100 lbs.	\$1.60 per 100 lbs.
Beans, peas, lentils and other legumes (pulses) dry, including split	30c. per 100 lbs.	60c. per 100 lbs.	75c. per 100 lbs.	\$1.10 per 100 lbs.
Salt, fine table salt	10 per cent.	20 per cent.	35 per cent.	70 per cent.
Tomatoes, peas and beans and other vegetables canned or in other airtight containers.	20 per cent.	36 per cent.	10 per cent.	26 per cent.

Canned foods are certainly competing against locally produced foods and ground provisions. But the Chamber of Commerce does not sell ground provisions and local foods, but derive profits chiefly from the sale of imported products.

LAND AVAILABILITY

For the sugar planters land availability means a threat to the security of their cheap and surplus labour. In the struggle between Mr. Hutchinson and the sugar gods, the administration sided with the latter. Frustrated Mr. Hutchinson left the colony on leave prior to the expiration of his contract. Even the Daily Argosy in an editorial of March 5th, 1952, had to admit that in this controversy the government had sided with "local opinion", which is none other than the sugar interest. It states:

"it looks to us, nevertheless, as though it (local opinion) has been given too much weight by senior officials in whose hands the decisions lie, and it may be that one day—and that not too far hence—this fact will be bitterly opposed".

Mr. Hutchinson has planned for colony-wide water-control schemes. He estimated that on the present rate of population increase all arable and cultivable lands will be taken up in 17 years if 25 acres were given to each family. His proposal was therefore that

all these schemes should be embarked upon immediately. As far as I am aware—all reports except one of the comprehensive schemes have not been made available, even to Legislators he recommended that the Torani and the Bonasika schemes were ill-conceived and should be scrapped. He opposed the Blocks 1, 11 & 111 on the Corentyne on the ground that they will involve the expenditure of money which will be wasted when the Greater Canje Water Control scheme is carried out. In any case they would provide only a limited amount of land. Block 1 11 & 111 will make available only 27,000 acres, as against $\frac{1}{2}$ million acres with the Greater Canje scheme. The Sugar planters have opposed Mr. Hutcheson's Schemes for two reasons. It will make TOO MUCH PROPERLY DRAINED AND IRRIGATED LAND AVAILABLE TOO QUICKLY. They will also cost the sugar kings more money. In his Report on the Boeraserie Scheme, he suggested that differential rates should be levied for irrigation water on the bases of water consumption and type of crop.

He cited the following figures:—

Existing Sugar Cane	\$5 per acre
New Sugar Cane	\$8 per acres
Banana	\$4 per acre
Autumn Rice Crop	\$2.25 per acre
Spring Rice Crop	\$1.50 per acre
Pasture	\$.75 per acre

But the Governor in Message No. 4 of 1953 disagreed with Mr. Hutchinson and suggested a flat rate of \$4 per acre. He stated:—

"Mr. Hutcheson in assessing the revenue position of the project used a system of applying different irrigation rates to the different crops. In practice this system would be extremely difficult to apply particularly in respect of small interspersed areas of fruit trees, ground provision, pasture etc.

Moreover this system provides no incentive to cultivate undeveloped lands or to lease the lands to the persons prepared to cultivate them if the owner is unwilling or unable to do so. It is considered that a more satisfactory system would be to apply a uniform rate over all lands. A rate of \$4.00 per acre would not be an unreasonable charge on any crops grown with the possible exception of pastures areas".

MINIMUM WAGE LAW

The sugar imperialists have spread their tentacles also into the field of Marketing and price fixing of farmers produce, and wage-fixing in industrial and commercial undertakings. The reason for this is obvious. When a worker leaves the sugar estate, he has either to seek outside employment or become a peasant farmer. If neither is too attractive, then he perforce has to remain where he is,

In the case of employment outside of the sugar industry wages must not be too attractive. Recall that the King Committee (quoted above) reported in 1944 that "some non-residents have left working on the fields on the estates for more profitable occupations." With the sugar producers, this is a fixed idea. No doubt, it refers to the U.S. air and naval bases. It was common rumour later substantiated by officers and employees of the United States Air and Naval bases that owing to local pressure by the Vested Interests, the Base authorities did not pay the minimum wage of 40 cents per hour as was provided for in the U.S. Fair Labour Standards Act. They paid a wage about half of the minimum.

At the Demerara Bauxite Company, where production had greatly increased during the war, wages ranged from 24 to 36 cents per hour, as against \$1.00 to \$1.50 (U.S.) per hour in the parent Company abroad. Mr. F. J. Seaford, then local boss of Bookers Empire, was also a director of the Demerara Bauxite Company.

It is in the light of the above facts that opposition to any minimum wage motion must be regarded. Recall that on the minimum wage motion which I introduced in the legislative council in 1950 support was found from only four elected members. Even on an amendment to reduce the sum from \$2 to Government minimum wage of \$1.52 per day then prevailing, all the 9 ex-officio and nominated members present voted against.

Fairly high wages established by a minimum wage law are likely to attract workers away from arduous cane field work to less arduous jobs, in other industrial and commercial areas like Georgetown, New Amsterdam, etc., even if there is a scarcity of jobs. The sugar producers naturally prefer a floating surplus around the sugar estates; therefore their opposition to minimum wage legislation.

MARKETING FARMERS PRODUCE

In the same way that the sugar-controlled Legislative Council can block a minimum wage law, it can introduce and pass reactionary legislation. Consider the Rice Marketing Board Ordinance of 1946—and the Rice Marketing Board (R.M.B.) setup wherein real power was and still is in the hands of Government nominees, F. J. Seaford and John D'Aguiar were old members. Now there are Mr. H. G. Seaford and the Hons. W. Raatgaver, John Fernandes and G. A. C. Farnum. All of these are directly or indirectly associated with the Chamber of Commerce or the sugar industry. It was this body, preceded by a hand-picked Cerna Rice Committee, which determined for how much and to whom export rice was to be sold. Although a statutory Rice Pro-

ducers Association Ordinance was passed at the same time as the Rice Marketing Board Ordinance in 1946, the regulations setting out the machinery for election of officers for the Rice Producers Association was so long delayed that elections did not take place until the latter part of 1947. The Rice Marketing Board is made up of eight Government nominees and eight rice producers the present Chairman being a Government nominee, Hon. John Fernandes. A travesty of democratic principle was perpetrated when the Governor accepted only five of the eight members chosen by the Rice Producers Council from among its 24 members. Of course, the loophole was that legally the Governor was empowered to appoint eight members from the R.P.A. Council—so he accepted only the five out of the eight selected by the Council and three others from the R.P.A. Council. The Rice Marketing Board was ostensibly created to eliminate the middle-men, the merchants who were exploiting the rice growers. But the real reason was to prevent the rise in prices of export rice to \$20 and \$25 per bag reached during the first world war, and the consequent drift from sugar to rice production.

This is borne out by the fact that after the establishment of Government control of the selling of rice as the single selling agency, the middle men were not eliminated but merely put to idleness and paid for a long time their average earnings. British Guiana's rice has been sold at about half the world's price. It is conservatively estimated that the rice farmers lost at least \$10 to \$15 million since the Board came into existence.

This was, no doubt the reason why in 1950 an amendment to the Rice Marketing Board Ordinance was made to exempt the company to be formed by the Colonial Development Corporation and the British Guiana Government from the restrictive provisions of the Rice Marketing Board Ordinance. The C. D. C., sound British state-capitalist business enterprise that it could not see itself competing successfully for labour with the sugar plantations, for its own rice plantations, especially if it had to sell its rice through a Board in which sugar held a strong position. It wanted to produce and sell rice with a free hand.

This aroused tremendous opposition from the rice peasants and the progressive politicians. Obviously there should not be two different kinds of laws for different sets of interests. Either the Rice Marketing Board be abolished or reformed to protect the interest of all. In mid-1951 the Legislative Council turned down a motion the object of which was to abolish the present "Fascist" controlled Rice Marketing Board and have it replaced by a similar single selling body, but democratically and co-operatively controlled by the rice peasants.

Incidentally, we have now been told that the C.D.C. did not think that there was much to be gained by embarking on the rice

industry directly. It was too marginal. So now, the C.D.C has decided on the much safer venture of lending the Rice Development Company \$5 million at a $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent higher interest rate than it borrows from the British Treasury. The loan, of course is to be secured by the British Guiana Government.

The sugar planters also sit in the Government Marketing Committee, which fixes the minimum guaranteed prices for farmers produce. These prices are fixed not on any scientific basis relating to the cost of production, but rather haphazardly. The Director of Agriculture once admitted that they were fixed empirically having some regard to the prices prevailing before the war. Those prices are generally fixed at a low level with the result that the farmers find it difficult to make a livelihood out of farming. The Government officials argue that in times of glut, the Government Produce Depot loses a great deal of money and that if prices were higher, the losses would be greater.

Losses have increased in the past for several reasons - Uncontrolled Competition from various types of foods imported from abroad; lack of proper distribution; lack of proper storage and preservation, etc.

TIED SUGAR SLAVES

Just in case non-availability of land with consequent high land rentals, poor drainage and irrigation, low farm prices and workers wages are not a sufficient deterrent to force the sugar worker to remain in and around the sugar estates, a new method has been devised to "tie" them. This now takes the form of nuclear-housing schemes.

The sugar planters calculate that there are 5,262 families of essential workers, and 6,555 families of non-essential, partime and occasional workers. They have declared that they are prepared to house the essential workers. For the non-essential workers, 9,334 house lots have been prepared on the front lands. These will be rented at nominal rentals. In some cases loans were generously provided by the estates. Now the Government-appointed Sugar Industry Welfare Fund Committee is making loans available from the Sugar Industry Fund,

This Fund is collected by a levy of 240 per ton on sugar exported stood in mid-1951 at about \$1 $\frac{1}{2}$ million. Any sugar worker or cane farmer can borrow up to \$500 for house

building purposes, A grant will be made on repayment as follows:

1. If repaid within 5 years 12 per cent
2. " " 10 " 8 per cent
3. " " thereafter 5 per cent

The underlying motive is to tie workers, even though non-essential, around the estates; and at the same time to take the glorious opportunity of entering directly into the field of profitable landlordism.

An examination of the leases to be signed by the estate workers reveals many objectionable features: i. e.

"the lessee shall not plant on the house lot bananas, plantains, coconuts, or any trees detrimental to the health conditions of the housing area nor erect on the house plot any cow byre or pig sty nor keep nor permit to stray on the house lot any cows, pigs horses, sheep, mules, goats or donkeys," and "the lessee shall not without the permission in writing of the lessor: (a) assign this lease or any interest of the lessee therein (b) sell or let any building or any part thereof erected on the house lot, (c) permit any person other than members of the lessee's family to occupy any part of the house lot or any part of any building erected thereon, and the lessee shall pay to the lessor an annual rental of \$2.88 and in the event of the house lot or any building or erection thereon being at any time rated or taxed by any competent authority, such rates and/or taxes shall be borne by the lessee".

The restrictions about the planting of fruit trees and the rearing of domestic animals while ostensibly done for sanitary considerations are in fact aimed at economic self sufficiency of the people. Militant trade unionists and politicians are aimed at when the objection to persons other than members of the family were inserted in the lease. The \$2.88 per house lot per year adds up to \$28,293 per year for total of 1228 acres which is approximately the area on which it is proposed to lay out 9,334 house lots for extra-nuclear houses. Compare this with 5 cents per acre paid to Government by the Sugar Companies for leased lands.

The sugar imperialists in their effort to secure cheap labour for the reaping of huge profits have thwarted the real development of British Guiana. This is a disservice which will be recorded in bold headlines when the true history of British Guiana is written.

PROFITS

The Sugar imperialists are making huge profits. They are fer-

ever telling us that sugar does not pay, but the balance sheets prove the opposite.

Bookers Bros. profits show the following as reported by the Stock Exchange Gazette.

CONSOLIDATED A/c

	Trading Post etc.		Net profit after Tax
1948	£768,679		£207,455
1949	£993,245		£277,233
1950	£1,257,827		£385,453
	Dividends	Tax-Free	Undivided
1948	£88,718	11¼ per cent	22 per cent
1949	£108,623	9¼ per cent (a)	14 per cent
1950	£123,097	9½ per cent	19 per cent
	(a) on increased capital.		
	Group trading surplus—		
	1949	£891,941	
	1950	£1,158,152	

Proposal to issue script bonus of one ordinary 10/- share for every 25 held. (£43,493)

The summary of the 52nd Annual General Meeting of Booker Bros., McConnell and Connell and Co. Ltd. was published in the London "Times" of July 16th 1952. Profits have reached a new ceiling. Consolidated accounts for the group for the year ending December 31, 1951 show a combined net profit of £660,677 (against £435,458) after deducting tax £686,445 (£405,994) and minority interests £16,628 (£8,706) and after setting aside to replacement reserves £505,642 (£317,701). The bracketed figures for 1950 show the steep rise in 1951. If we add the amount set aside for taxation and reserves to profit we get a total figure of £2,237,904 (about \$10 million) which the workers have produced but which do not come to them. This figure of course is arrived at after deducting the tremendous salaries paid to directors and others who are being imported in ever increasing numbers to displace local personnel and run the Bookers enterprises. It also excludes the large sums being expended for the "Booker Town" going up at Bel Air, the palatial residences in the bosses quarters in the sugar estates and the grand new business premises recently erected in Georgetown. Incidentally this total profit has been earned by capital amounting to £5,614,523 as against £4,891,650 for 1950. Dividend paid free of income tax was 1 shilling per share of 10 shilling value. In addition shareholders were given a bonus of one additional share for every 25 ordinary shares held.

ABOLITION OF TAXES

In the face of the huge profits earned, the Government has

abolished in 1953 three taxes—distillery, acreage and sugar duty. These taxes collected about \$244.00 annually. The Government has not however, forced the sugar gods into implementing the contributory pension scheme, which was one of the major recommendations of the Venn Commission.

Sir Charles Wooley in his Message on Venn Commission's Recommendations stated:

Ex-sugar estate workers receive benefits like others, under the Government Old Age Pension Scheme, and at the present time about 2600 or approximately 30 per cent of the total number of the old age pensioners are ex-sugar estate workers."

In 1951, the actual expenditure by the Government for Old Age Pensions was \$461,233. The expenditure for 1952 is estimated at \$618,000. Little wonder that the sugar imperialists do not want to implement the contributory Scheme. They always like to shift their burden on the taxpayers.

PULLING DOWN CHIMNEYS

The accusation has always been made, and maliciously, that we in the P. P. P. want to destroy the sugar industry and to pull down the sugar chimney. This never has been, nor will be, the policy of the P.P.P. However, it must be pointed that we are thoroughly opposed to the present system, the present organization, of the sugar industry. The workers are sweated, and millions of dollars produced by them find their way into the pockets of sugar 'gods' in England.

The wealth produced in the industry must be better distributed so that the workers must get their due and rightful share. Proper planning to take care of the seasonally unemployed, tied and surplus sugar workers, must be an immediate and urgent objective, both in the interests of the workers and British Guiana.

This reorganisation can take two forms. Complete nationalisation or reforms. As a socialist party, nationalisation of the sugar industry, and indeed all major industries is our objective. In the interim, while we are still tied to British imperialism with limited constitutional powers certain reforms have to be undertaken to break the back of imperialism.

Professor Arthur Lewis in his paper "Issues in Land Settlement" wrote about the sugar industry;—

"New forms of organisation must be tried, and must be tried urgently. In Puerto Rico the government has shown itself alive to the fact, and is greatly to be praised for taking the initiative in experimenting with the Proportional Profit Farm. In the British territories, on the other hand, governments are content to meet a succession of disturbances with a succession of commissions of enquiry. This is not good enough... New forms must be created which will take the West Indian sugar industry 'out of politics' in the sense of earning general acceptance,

or the West Indian community will sooner or later simply tear itself into pieces and destroy the sugar industry in the process."

In Puerto Rico, the Government introduced and applied an old "500 acre" law. No estate was permitted to hold more than 500 acres. The excess lands were purchased by the government, and given out. Individual families got up to 25 acres. Proportional Profit farms (workers getting wages and sharing profits) and co-operatives were also set up.

In another paragraph of the same report, Professor Lewis, referring to the system of cane farming in Fiji stated:—

"Some people believe that this is the system which will eventually supply the West Indies with a solution to the problems of its sugar industry. A large scale agency will plough the land, control irrigation, supply seedlings and fertilisers, organise harvesting, and operate factories, while peasants will plant and cultivate the crop on their own account, subject to charges for services performed. The peasants will have a representative Council, but this will not take over the functions of the agency. In Fiji and in the Sudan the agency has been a private company, but it might equally well be a public corporation, as it is now to be in the Sudan."

I must point out that even under the Fiji system the sugar workers will be much better off than at present. When the Venn Commission visited British Guiana I submitted a memorandum showing the profits earned by the sugar producers. I calculated the average cost of growing 1 acre of sugar cane (1 plant cane and 3 ratoons). From figures supplied to me by workers, drivers and book keepers the average price paid to labourers for planting, reaping and transporting one acre of cane was \$86.59 in 1943. For manure, mules, oxen, punts etc. the average cost per acre was \$33.24. Taking the price in 1948 which was paid to cane farmers for canes supplied to the estates, the average yield per acre of sugar cane was \$243.33. On the above basis the rate of exploitation was about 142 per cent. In other words, on the basis of a 10 hour day, while the workers were paid for only about 4 hours they gave about 6 hours of free labour to the sugar "gods".

The Fiji system or the Puerto Rico system would therefore be much more profitable to the sugar workers. Sugardom is not only running the Sugar industry. It is also running the whole colony. The time has come when a People's Government must replace our sugar-coated government and reorganize the economy in the interest of the broad masses of the people.

Join the fight against sugar imperialism. Make B. G. British Guiana and not Bookers Guiana.

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