

STRAIGHT TALK

BY
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OIL SHORTAGE

FOR one reason or another—seasonal supply of copra and coconuts, break down of mills, hurricanes etc. causing delay of schooners—shortages of edible oil have hit the public. Some merchants profiteered and blackmarketed imposing conditions of sale, etc.

Side-line

Let's deal first with the shortage of the basic raw material — coconut and copra. Coconut producers claim that it is uneconomic to go in for coconut cultivation. They say that unless there is an increase in the price of copra, coconut production will go into further decline. Others, however, representing consumer interests, point out that the last increases did not check the decline. They claim that the real reason for the decline is the fact that coconut production is only a side line activity for the many large-scale plantation owners who presently do the bulk of coconut production.

Improve Production

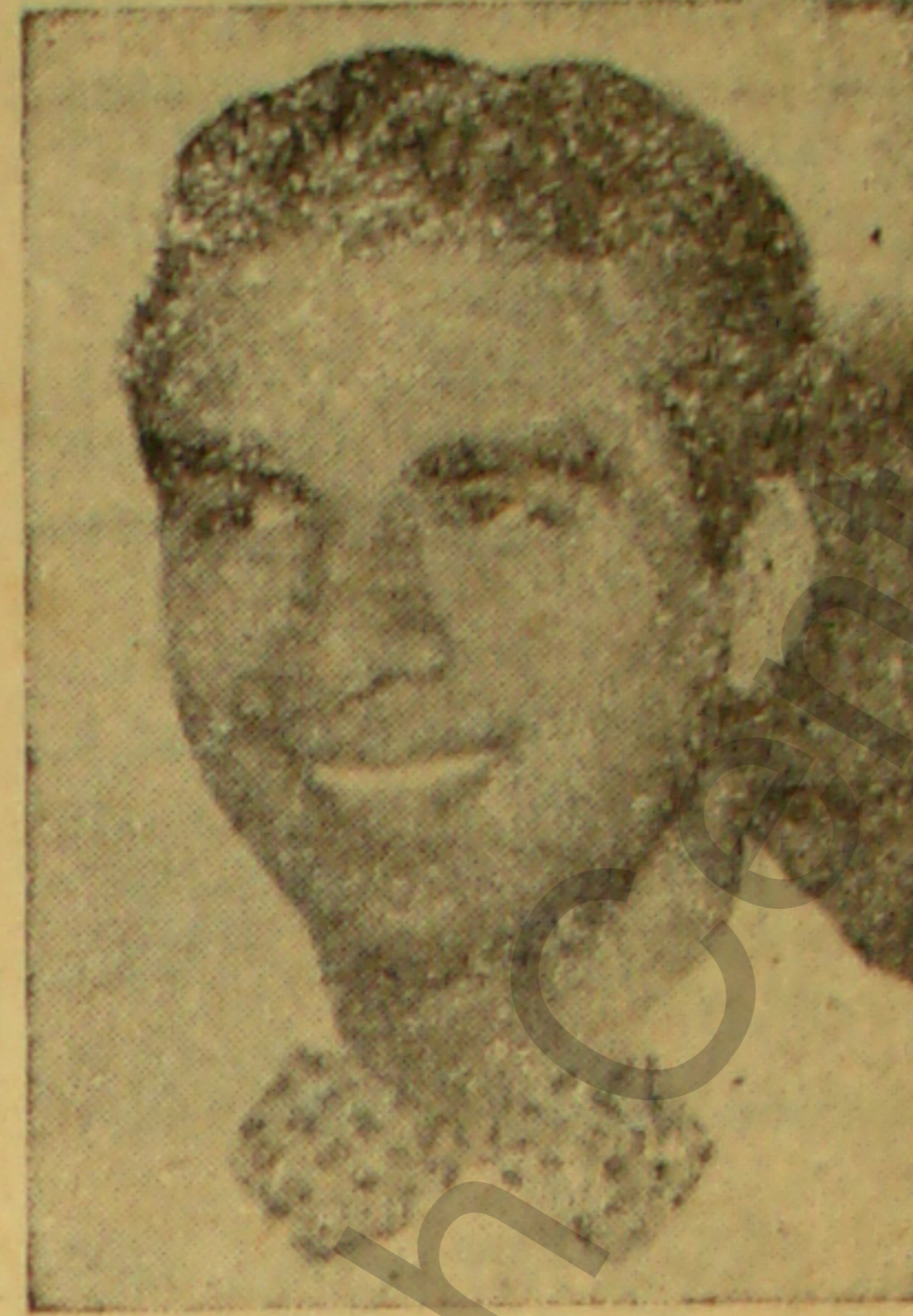
What is to be done? Every effort should be made to improve coconut production. A fruit tree planting campaign should be started. Every family should put in at least one coconut tree in his yard. The Sugar Producers' Association should agree to one coconut tree being planted in each extra-nuclear housing lot. At the same time we must quickly find a suitable short term oil crop —soya bean, sesame, etc.—to rotate as a second crop with rice.

Under Control

In the meantime, to protect consumers from shortages and blackmarketing, adequate stocks of oil will always be held in hand at the Government Oil Control. In mid December 1,600 drums of soya bean oil arrived from Europe. An additional 480 drums of oil came last week from St. Lucia. 360 tons of copra are promised from St. Lucia for the first six months of 1959. Steps

are now being taken to import the balance of 640 tons of copra or equivalent in oil required for 1st half year 1959.

Oil prices will still be controlled. Wholesalers will get as much oil as they want. In fact, wholesalers who have been complaining about supplies in times of shortage are being asked to buy directly from the Oil Control. This is to establish their claims for the future, just in case for some accidental unforeseen circumstances there is again a temporary shortage.



SMALL MILLS v. CENTRAL MILLS CONTROVERSY

RICE milling is a no. 1 problem child in Brit. Guiana. There are two large efficient central Government run mills—one at Mahaicony-Abary and the other at Anna Regina. Both are losing money. The reason is, that they are not able to attract enough padi. At least 250,000 bags which are regarded as minimum through-put or break even point are required by each factory.

The large mills cannot get enough padi because too many small mills are dotted all over. At one time the farmers particularly on the Essequibo Coast and Essequibo Islands were rebelling against the small millers. This was ideal for the Central Mills. But bad public relations drove them back into the arms of the small millers.

However, it is now conceded on all sides that these small mills—single stage huller type—are inefficient. The Millers Association at one time said that over a million dollars per year are lost by under milling with these inefficient hullers.

Cuke Enquiry

To break out of the impasse, Sir Archibald Cuke was asked by the Rice Development Company to take a look. He recommended

that small mills in zones of Central Mill operations should close down and compensation paid at the rate of 30 cents per bag of rice milled over a period of 8 years. The mills were to be used as storage bonds for which the millers would get additional payment.

The millers rejected Cuke's recommendations. So did the farmers. The farmers once bitten were twice shy. They are afraid of a monopoly even if it's a Government monopoly. What guarantee is there, they say, that they will always have a PPP government.

No Compulsion

I do not believe that compulsory closure of small mills by legislation will work. If this is put through, it will have to be followed by another compulsion—compulsion of farmers to sell their padi to the central mills only. I will not be a party to any type of compulsion.

Way Out

The way out of the present deadlock is:—
[1] Cut down the top heavy cost of administration of Georgetown Head Office of the R.D.C. and let secretarial and accountancy work be done by the R.M.B.

[2] Improve public relations and give greater say to rice farmers in administration

and management of R.D.C. Good public relations is already paying dividends. The Mahaicony mill for the first time has passed the 300,000 bags mark and now has 325,000 bags; the Anna Regina mill has 125,000 bags as against 65,000 last year.

[3] Convert R.D.C. mills as soon as possible into cooperative mills.

[4] Prevent new additional mills from being erected in the zone of operations of the two Central Mills; but permit old single-huller type mills to modernise to their present capacity with small multi-stage mills.

[5] Make more rice lands available by drainage and irrigation works in the Abary area and the Essequibo Islands and Coast.

Co-operative Production and Marketing

[continued from page 8]

advantages, but when it comes to putting them into practice it is surprising to meet so many obstacles and difficulties in persuading farmers to engage in this profitable way of doing business.

A noted economist has said: "Of all the classes of society, the farmers are the most easily divided, the most reluctant to stand together for their common defence and the promotion of their common interest."

Nevertheless with an intelligent agricultural community, such as ours and with soil sufficiently fertile such as ours, we should be able to produce all the things which make for a happy, healthy and prosperous Guiana.

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