

FLOODS AND AGRICULTURE

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" . . . 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."

This is how the Royal (Moyne) Commission put it in its report of 1945.

Long before that, legislators including Joseph Eleazer of Buxton in the 1920's petitioned the Colonial Office to tackle the problem of drainage and floods, so inimical to the farmers in the countryside.

In a dispatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1943, the then Governor, Sir Gordon Lethem, spoke bluntly of the obligation of the British government to adopt a policy for the provision of a comprehensive scheme of water control. He wrote:

"I may be pardoned if I speak with complete candour. His Majesty's government should, in my view, accept now in one way or another the obligation of a long-range policy to finance major drainage and irrigation schemes on this full scale; or if this obligation cannot be accepted, a frank statement should now be made that it is impossible to foresee the time when adequate steps can be taken to ensure proper living conditions for the populations of the coastlands."

He did not foresee any time when African and Indian farmers would be prosperous enough to carry out these works. If the British Government, he argued, did not then undertake these works, then it would be forced to do so later. Of the sugar planters, he said in the same dispatch that "the African at an early date and the Indian at a later, were imported to serve an economic interest which had made large profits but has failed to maintain itself and them."

Only in 1950 as a result of the agitation of the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) and the People's Progressive Party (PPP) was a start made.

Speaking on drainage and irrigation in the Legislative Council, the then Governor, Sir Charles Woolley, 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 schemes, but there has never been a comprehensive survey on which we could frame more safely schemes of the kind we are embarking upon."

Why the woeful neglect after nearly 150 years of British rule? Why before the coming of the PPP into government was there grave land hunger with the average farmer having only $3\frac{3}{4}$ acres of land in a country with only about 7 persons per square mile? Because the sugar plantocracy, faced with a labour shortage problem through the ending of slavery (1838) and of indenture (1917) and decimation of the population by malaria, did not want the development of an independent peasantry.

In 1944, the report of the committee headed by P. W. King on **Certain Questions in Connection with Piece Work on Sugar Estates** said:

"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."

In 1948, the **Report of the Labour Department** disclosed that the average number of days worked was higher on the East Bank, Demerara, than in other parts of the country. "This", it added, "may be due to the greater dependence on earnings on the East Bank, owing to the absence of rice and farmlands in this area."

The plantocracy thus used their governmental power to monopolize the land on the coast, to prevent the leasing of colony and crown lands to peasant farmers and even to re-

sume possession of lands leased in the sugar estates to workers for "provision" and rice farming. And drainage and irrigation schemes (the East Coast Water Conservancy, the Bonasika Irrigation Scheme, and Torani Canal) were carried out for their sole benefit.

Land reform and water control in the circumstances became the main platform of the PPP against the colonialists and their supporters.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, it intensified its campaign for the release of 88,873 acres held by the sugar estates under D.H.M.P. (During Her Majesty's Pleasure) leases at pepper-corn rentals of about 5 cents per acre.

The first PPP government (1953) amended the **Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) Ordinance of 1945**, and placed additional powers in the hands of the District Commissioner (D.C.). If the landlord failed to observe the rules of good estate management (digging and maintaining drainage and irrigation canals), the D.C. could give him a specified time to undertake the works. If he refused to do so, the work could be done by the government at public expense and the cost recovered from the landlord.

The amendment also included the fixing of rentals for "new" rice lands.

Another decision of the PPP government was to refuse landlords, who owned first depths, automatic leases to second- and third-depth lands.

But unlike Latin America, land was not the major problem. In pre-and post-independent Guyana, the great bulk of land is government-owned.

The greatest bugbear is water control. Inadequate drainage and irrigation have exposed the farmers to loss from floods and droughts.

In its fight for a comprehensive scheme of water control, the PPP was supported by the then Consulting Engineer to the Public Works Department, F. E. Hutchinson, who had come with a wealth of experience from India.

He severely criticized the **ad hoc** measures, such as the limited Bonasika Scheme on the West Coast of Demerara

which was designed to help mainly the sugar estates. He recommended the scrapping of this scheme for the larger Boeraserie Extension Project, which he designed to include help for the farmers on the West Coast of Demerara and on the East Bank of Essequibo.

In the county of Berbice, he recommended, as he put it in one of his reports, "for the seventh time the scrapping of the Torani Canal" which was designed to bring water from the Berbice River into the Canje River to aid the sugar plantations on the lower Corentyne. He recommended, instead, the half-a-million acre Greater Canje Project.

He condemned the East Coast Water Conservancy with its high dam and limited storage capacity, and in its place advocated a comprehensive scheme from the Demerara and Berbice rivers embracing the Mahaica, Mahaicony and Abary rivers on two grounds. Firstly, being too near the coast, it inundated thousands of acres of fertile land. Secondly, being small in area, the water level had to be kept high to store sufficient water for the sugar estates throughout the year. Thus, in times of heavy rainfall, great pressure is exerted on the "pegasse" earth dam, with resulting occasional ruptures as in 1934, 1950 and more recently in 1969 at Cane Grove. To release pressure on the dams, the Lama and Maduni Sluices on the Mahaica river are opened from time to time. This contributes to the flooding of the whole Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary area.

Hutchinson was opposed in principle to empoldering certain areas like Blocks I, II, and III on the Corentyne which were undertaken by the Interim government (1954-1957). These empolders only aggravated the flooding problems of the surrounding unempoldered areas.

He favoured the construction of huge conservancies or reservoirs. These would serve both for drainage and irrigation. At times of heavy rainfall, they would catch and store water in the backlands, and prevent flooding of the frontlands. In dry weather, irrigation water would be supplied from the reservoirs by gravity. Thus the age-old problem would be licked at one stroke — the flooding and expensive pumping out of water during the rainy season, and the shortage of water in the dry season.

The conservancies would also be built further aback, about 25 miles from the coast as compared with the about 7 miles for the East Coast Conservancy. With a high birth rate and rapid population increase agriculture, and thus more land availability, was seen as the short-term solution to the growing unemployment problem.

The PPP popularized Hutchinson's proposals and urged their immediate implementation. The problem of land hunger and unemployment was pressing. In 1956, an ILO team had estimated a rate of unemployment of 18 per cent, and under-employment of 9 per cent.

Hutchinson came in conflict with the sugar planters as they viewed the problem from different angles.

He saw the problem as a scientist and humanitarian. He argued that agriculture in the short-term would be the main thrust for development and a solution to the unemployment problem; even if his schemes were carried out, all the available coastal fertile land, based on 25 acres per family, would meet the needs of the growing population for only another 17 years.

The sugar planters were concerned with a cheap and abundant supply of labour. They opposed Hutchinson's schemes for two reasons; firstly, they would have made too much properly drained and irrigated land available too quickly; secondly, they would have also cost the sugar planters more.

In his report on the Boeraserie Scheme, he suggested that differential rates should be levied for irrigation water on the basis of water consumption and type of crop.

Existing Sugar Cane	..	\$5	per acre
New Sugar Cane	..	\$8	per acre
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 1951/52 of 9th May, 1952, disagreed with Hutchinson, and suggested a flat rate of \$4 per acre. He stated: "Mr. Hutchinson in assessing the revenue position of the project used a system of apply.

ing 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."

Because the colonial administration sided with the planters, Hutchinson in frustration left the country.

Even the *Daily Argosy* in an editorial of March 5, 1952, had to admit that in this controversy the government sided with "local opinion", which is none other than the sugar interest. It stated:

"... 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."

The Interim government (1954-56) came under pressure for water control from the PPP after the suspension of the Constitution and the forceful removal of the PPP from the government in 1953. And with the return of the PPP government in late 1957, drainage and irrigation was given the highest priority.

From 1954 to 1964, were completed the Boerasirie Extension Project, the Black Bush Scheme, and the Tapacuma Lake Scheme. The Land-of-Canaan sluice, unlike the Lama and Maduni sluices which discharged excess water into the Mahaica River, was built to release water from the East Coast Conservancy into the Demerara River.

The Pomeroun Follow-up and the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary (M.M.A.) projects would have been undertaken by the PPP government immediately after the Tapacuma had it not been removed by constitutional manipulation and fraud at the end of 1964 (the M.M.A. project was the first to be

completely designed by Guyanese engineers; previous projects had been done by British consulting engineers, Halcrow and Partners).

A UN feasibility project was also started by the PPP government for the half-million acre Greater Canje Project.

The PNC regime downgraded drainage and irrigation, despite its belated recognition of the importance of agriculture. Previously, the PPP government had been attacked as "rice government" and "coolie government", for emphasizing drainage and irrigation, and agriculture.

In the 1954-59 and 1960-64 Development Plans, 25% and 30% respectively were allocated for drainage and irrigation. Under the PNC 7-year (1966-72) D-plan, the allocation was sharply reduced to 13%, amounting to \$40 million.

But only a small portion of the amount allocated was actually spent. No work was done either on the earthen dam from Mahaica to Abary, planned at \$10.5 million, or for the Canje Basin dam, pump, etc., planned at \$24 million.

Failure by the PNC regime to carry out the Pomeroun Follow-up scheme and the dredging of the Pomeroun River at its mouth has resulted in severe flooding and ruin to thousands of farmers in one of the "bread-basket" areas.

Lack of maintenance work on dams, kokers, and relief outlets, including the cleaning of the Oena Creek caused breaches of the Tapacuma Conservancy dam at Golden Fleece and Perseverance on the Essequibo Coast.

Instead, vast sums of money have been diverted to roads, sea-defense, airport and airstrips, and other forms of non-productive infrastructure. This is in accord with the economic foreign policies of the PNC's main imperialist backers, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, in their present financial and economic predicament with high unemployment, huge surpluses of industrial and agricultural goods, declining share of world trade and balance of payments problems. It also meets the age-old wishes of the sugar planters.

The non-economic Timehri-Linden highway consumed \$17 million, over 50 per cent more than originally estimated. Even a former Minister of Economic Development, J. Henry Thomas, was highly critical; he remarked that a modest \$5

million road could have sufficed for the purpose of the passenger traffic. Further, the government did not plan the building of drainage outlets and feeder roads from the highway to the Demerara river-front to help the farmers on the East Bank of Demerara.

The latest exercise in "squandermania" is the \$28 million allocation for road construction to improve the approaches to Georgetown!

Meanwhile, the PNC-controlled local authorities have failed to use their statutory powers to force the landlords to maintain adequately drainage and irrigation canals and kokers. No doubt this is due to the fact that a large majority are strong financial backers of the PNC.

In the face of countrywide floods and criticisms, the government has announced the spending of more than \$9 million for pumps and pumping stations.

This stop-gap measure is perhaps being taken at the insistence of the United States to facilitate the export of their surplus equipment and materials. Already signed is an agreement for \$5 million with the US Import-Export Bank; now (June) being negotiated is a further loan for \$4.4 million for the installation of the pumps, other works such as clearing of approaches to channels, and civil engineering expertise!

In the end, these pumps, like the rice silos, are likely to be expensive "white-elephants", monuments to the blundering of the PNC.

Drainage by pumping is several times more expensive than by gravity and tide; rates charged for drainage by the Drainage and Irrigation Board are generally highly subsidized in the areas where pumps are used.

The answer to floods and droughts is the conservancy system which integrates drainage and irrigation and obviates the necessity for expensive pumping.

If agriculture is to be put on a sound footing and modernized, the government must embark immediately on the implementation of the projects proposed by Hutchinson with modifications if any. Priority must also be given to the adequate maintenance of outlet channels, kokers and dams.

In the meantime, because of the bungling and negligence on the part of the government, at least \$5 million should be voted, as was proposed by the PPP in the National Assembly, for compensation and rehabilitation.

THE TRUE ROLE OF THE FALSE SOCIALISTS AND LEFTISTS

H. A. I. A.

The question has often been asked: Why do anti-imperialist governments in many countries of the Middle East, Africa and Latin America persecute Communists and restrict the activities of the working class.

The question is perfectly understandable. Anti-Communism from the right is familiar. But anti-Communism from within the left is not so easily understood.

In recent months, Communists have come under attack in the Sudan, Iraq, Algeria and Nigeria, as well as in countries where the governments are less consistently anti-imperialist, as in Tunisia and Morocco.

Why is this so? It is necessary to understand the character of the governments that restrict or persecute the Communists in Third World countries.

Some of these governments, as those in South Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Paraguay, Nicaragua, and Haiti are composed of local dictators (representing landlord and bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces), who owe their positions and their economic future to the imperialists, and act as their puppets.

Such governments are in no sense anti-imperialist, and their actions against the working class, the trade unions and the Communists are not difficult to understand.

But the cases we are concerned with are those of governments which, generally speaking, take an anti-imperialist position. They even introduce some progressive measures internally, including land reform, the building of industry, the encouragement of cooperatives and some progressive social reforms. Such governments take action to control the activities of the big foreign monopolies and usually declare Socialism as their aim.

Yet, despite all this, they hold the working class down,