

STRAIGHT TALKby ~~Cheddi~~ Jagan.FIGHT FOR DECENT STANDARDS

Sugar workers not only get low wages. Engaged mostly in task or piece work, they suffer exploitation from low rates and speed-up. And because of MPCA-company unionism, the sugar planters generally take advantage of the certain variable factors -- soil conditions, moisture, etc. to change the task rates.

But the greatest hardship facing workers is the lack of work, thus the lack of income, in non-grinding periods. Two or three days work per week cannot sustain a family, especially under today's daily rise in the prices of consumer necessities.

What is needed is a minimum guaranteed wage; work or no work. This has been instituted in several countries. The workers and their militant unions have fought and obtained this right as a condition of their employment. And this right must be fought for in Guyana. After all, it is not the role of the workers only to slave while the employers continue to make huge profits.

CUBA

The sugar planters must accept blame and responsibility for the present plight of the sugar workers. At the latter's expense, the former continue to modernize and mechanize and to export raw products -- rum, molasses and dark sugar to be processed and manufactured abroad.

From the days of slavery, raw sugar is still being sent abroad and sent back as refined sugar. Rum and molasses are sold overseas at dirt-cheap prices -- about \$2 per gallon for high-proof alcohol and about 50¢ per gallon for molasses.

The sugar industry can provide more jobs and the workers have to struggle for this. Take Cuba as an example. Before the Castro revolution, the sugar workers suffered from the usual problems affecting Guyanese workers -- poor living and working conditions and high unemployment.

Today, there is no more unemployment. Cuba has a labour shortage problem. Civil servants have to volunteer one week's labour every month to help with cane-cutting.

The unemployment problem has been licked in Cuba because a transformation has taken place in the countryside. Every sugar estate has become a hive of activity and the centre of a huge agro-industrial complex. Waste and by-products of sugar are now being used to establish other industries for the enhancement of national income and employment opportunities. As much income is earned from by-products of sugar as from sugar itself.

TRANSFORMATION

A factory converts molasses into high-protein yeast. Molasses, yeast, bagasse (burnt in Guyana) and fish meal (produced from fish waste from an expanded fishing industry) produce a cheap stockfeed, which has revolutionized the livestock and dairy industry.

Guyana has to pay in cash for the buses bought from Leland Motors of Great Britain. Cuba pays for buses from the same company by the sale of eggs, millions of which are produced yearly by chickens feeding on cheap stockfeed.

Then there is the cattle -- beef and dairy -- industries. Here again cheap stockfeed has radically changed the situation.

Beef cattle not only provide beef, but the raw material for many related industries -- leather, medicinal, etc.

From milk, there are the dairy industries - butter, cheese, ice cream, condensed milk, etc.

Little wonder that Dr. Iton, Chief Livestock Officer of the Trinidad delegation which visited Cuba told the press that Cuba had made more progress in ten years in the livestock industry than Trinidad had made in fifty years.

Norman Girwar, the manager of Trinidad's Cane Farmers Association, after a visit to Cuba in 1971 told newsmen that "the Cuban experience indicates that a greater measure of diversification of the economy and the dedication and commitment of its people to nation-building hold lessons for us which might be followed by profits in Trinidad and Tobago."

Mr. Girwar went on to say that Cuba had more than seven million head of high grade cattle and the total area for cattle farming was greater than that for sugar cane. In addition, large acreages was under citrus, corn, tobacco, pineapple and coffee. Nickel and copper were being mined and an increasing quantity of petroleum was being won.

He observed also that there was no unemployment, no begging in the streets. A cane farmer lived in a house a little less comfortable than that of a general manager of a factory.

In Guyana, on the other hand, there is not progress but retrogression under the PNC and the poor are getting poorer. Rene Dumont, FAO agronomist had recommended that Guyana should concentrate on the dairy industry. We have a captive market, he said. About \$8 million of milk and milk products are imported into Guyana annually. But under the PNC regime, which penalises the farmers, milk production is going down.

FREEDOM

In Guyana, the problems of the people are compounding. Apart from unemployment, there are rising prices and cut in educational and health services.

In Cuba, on the other hand, one is constantly hearing of more and more benefits and free services for the people.

In addition to previous free-of-charge services (in housing, education, popular participation in sports), there have been added the following items to the free or nearly-free list.

1. Nursery schools, entirely free of charge since January, 1967, including pedagogical and medical care, breakfast, lunch and dinner, and in some, bed and board for six days of the week.
2. Free admission to all types of national sporting events.

3. Reduction of urban bus fares.
4. Elimination of the tunnel fare under Havana Bay (the only toll that still remained in Cuba.)
5. Free public telephone service throughout the nation (and the installation of 800 additional public telephones).
6. Completely free funeral services (since August 1967).
7. Elimination of the tax on water in all kinds of dwellings.
8. Elimination of a series of taxes on the peasant population (which had been paid by the private peasants).

To all this, we must add ~~an~~ free education from grade school to the university, including technological training; public medicine on a nation-wide scale; reduction of charges for electricity and private telephones (earlier achievements).

The coming years will bring the elimination of payments in Cuba's clinic or "mutualist" system, the elimination of all rents (on dwellings whose owners still pay rent) for all dwellings throughout the country, without forgetting that the Revolution had already reduced rents by 40 to 50%.

The latest praise for Cuba has come from a study by the Twentieth Century Fund. Entitled "The Alliance that lost its way," the study stated that Cuba had come closer to some goals of the Alliance for Progress than most of the Latin American countries, and in health and education, the Castro Government had carried out more ambitious and nationally comprehensive programmes than any of the other Latin American countries.

NATIONALIZATION

Guyana must follow the lead of Cuba. Sugar faces a difficult future with Britain's proposed entry into the European Common Market. The sugar planters will either curtail production or go into ~~for~~ further mechanisation. In either case the workers will suffer.

While the sugar workers are fighting for reforms -- increased wages, profit-sharing, better working and living conditions -- they must demand revolutionary changes. This means firstly, the nationalisation of the sugar industry; and secondly, transformation as has been carried out in Cuba.

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