STRAIGHT TALK

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 black-marked, imposing conditions of sale, etc.

Oil prices will still be controlled. Wholesalers will get as much oil as they can. And 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 of any accident unforeseen, there is again a temporary shortage.

SIDE-LINE

Let’s deal first with the shortage of the basic raw material—coconut. Coconut producers claim that it is uneconomical 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, reproaching consumers’ ignorance, 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 sideline 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 its 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—jute, bean, sesame, etc.—to rotate as a second crop with rice.

UNDER CONTROL

In the meantime, to protect consumers from shortage and black-marking, adequate stocks of oil will always be held in hand at the Government oil control. In mid-December 1,500 drums of soybean oil arrived from Europe. An additional 460 drums of oil came last week from St. Lucia. 360 tons of copra were promised from St. Lucia for the first six months of 1959. Stocks are now being taken to import the balance of 640 tons of copra or equivalent in oil required for 1st half year 1959.

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S SMALL MILLS VS. 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 throughput or break even point are required by each factory.

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

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 3 cents per bag of rice milled over a period of 3 years. The mills were to be used as storage b)nds 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 compulsion is the answer. 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 accounting work be done by the R.M.I.

(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 against 65,000 last year.

(3) Convert R.D.C. mills as soon as possible into co-operative mills.

(4) Prevent new additional mills from being erected in the zone of operations of the two Central Mills but permit only single-huller type mills to modernize 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

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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 healthy and prosperous Guiana.

AGENTS WANTED

Co-operative Production and Marketing

All over the Country to sell RICE

Good Commission offered INTERESTED?

For information write P.P. Office, 73 Wellington St. G.T.