

RURAL RECONSTRUCTION IN JAMAICA

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DISTANCE is more than a matter of miles. Jamaica lies over 2000 miles to the south of Halifax, but the Jamaican village of Moseley Hall—remote, inaccessible, backward—is much further away. What would seem poverty to a Canadian village would be well-nigh wealth in Moseley Hall; here the prevailing sunshine makes life possible, but mercilessly reveals the incredible squalor and dirt. Tumbledown shacks of one or two rooms shelter large families; venereal disease is prevalent; most of the people are illiterate.

But "a revolution has broken out in Moseley Hall," writes one of the workers of *Jamaica Welfare, Ltd.* Where there was disunity, men, women and children are now working together for each other. "Five teams of 12 men each have been organized, with their Captains and Secretaries—65 working men. Three acres of land have been obtained for use as a demonstration plot, and here four of the teams work every Tuesday; the fifth team is held in reserve, while the others vie with each other in speed. The other days the men devote to working on each other's land. The whole village is as one, and already surrounding landowners are offering help, so impressed are they with the change in the lives and characters of the people. The land for a building has been given, and plans for its erection are underway; cooking pots have been purchased co-operatively; khaki clothing is to be purchased in the same way."

Considered by itself, the effort is dramatic, full of promise; put this tiny village back in its proper place in the Jamaican landscape, and we realise at once that the task of reconstructing rural life even in so small an island as Jamaica is a tremendous one.

This work of rural reconstruction is now being undertaken by *Jamaica Welfare, Ltd.*, a philanthropic organization which came into existence in 1937 as a result of discussions between Mr. N. W. Manley and Mr. Sam Zemurray of the *United Fruit Company*. Mr. Manley, a Jamaican Rhodes Scholar, and a practising barrister, pictured the condition of the peasantry, the "forgotten" people of Jamaica, badly housed and illiterate,

the prey of ignorance and disease. In an agricultural community these people knew nothing of scientific agriculture. Although there were 250,000 children, out of about 300,000 on the School Registers only 200,000 attended school, and attendance, not being compulsory, was most irregular. Indeed 90% of the children left school between the ages of 12 and 13 before completing their school course; the result was a very high rate of illiteracy—at least 50% throughout the island.

Such a rate of illiteracy, together with starvation wages and casual employment, does not help to develop a high sense of responsibility or of continence; seventy out of every one hundred children are illegitimate, and venereal disease takes its dreadful toll amongst a community often ignorant of the real cause of the disease; the men in one district asserted that gonorrhoea was caused by stubbing one's toe and that syphilis was the result of a strain. So impressed was Mr. Zemurray with the need for welfare work that he suggested a cess of $\frac{1}{2}$ d on every bunch of bananas purchased in Jamaica by the Fruit Companies. Both the *United* and *Standard Fruit* companies readily accepted the suggestion, and *Jamaica Welfare, Ltd.*, was formed to administer the funds thus provided.

The company thus formed is entirely independent of the fruit companies, who laid down one condition and one only, that the funds given by them should be used for the welfare of the peasantry. Its Directors give their services freely, and formulate and carry out their policy and programme within the terms of the gift without any interference whatever. Formed in 1937 with a Board of 12 Directors, the company now has a secretary and staff of 22 including organizers of co-operative work, of women's welfare work, and of recreational and health work.

The problems of a small community are not necessarily fewer or less difficult than those facing a large country. Here, in an island of 4,400 square miles, is a population of one and a quarter million, the vast majority being the black or coloured descendants of negro slaves emancipated just over a century ago. Added to the divisions of race and colour are divisions common to northern countries—the mercantile and proprietor classes on the one hand, the labouring classes on the other. Thus the problems of ignorance and unemployment, of disease and grim poverty such as may be found in a large country, are all present in acute form in a small land possessed of small resources.

It was the duty of the newly-formed company to elaborate

a programme for the social welfare of Jamaica. For more than a hundred years the Church had played a very great and important part as the pioneer in social welfare, and it still contributes powerfully to the island's life in this and other respects, but it was the natural tendency for such work to become sectionalised. Particularly in recent years the Government has tried to extend its social services, but no planned or coordinated programme of social welfare had been formulated.

The problems facing the company were manifold, and the funds so generously made available were limited. To avoid the danger of squandering efforts and resources, the following fundamental principles were laid down:

- (a) No attempt should be made to embark on purely economic or commercial ventures. Such schemes might be aided only in very special circumstances where
 - (i) Such a scheme was already in process of development and could with help be established as a co-operative effort;
 - (ii) Such a scheme might lead to the development of an industry suited to depressed agricultural areas and capable of being organized co-operatively. The objective in all such schemes was not the making of profits, but the improvement of social conditions by the development of a new industry organized on co-operative lines.
- (b) No attempt should be made to take over duties which rightly belonged to the Government, duties such as the provision of educational or medical services.
- (c) A certain proportion of the funds of the company was set aside to cover grants to existing organizations or institutions whose work fell in line with the principles of the company, but all forms of charitable relief to individuals were excluded.

Jamaica Welfare, Ltd., devoted the first months of its existence to the consideration of a number of possible lines of activity, but attention soon centred on three — an Agricultural Training Centre and Land Settlement, Community Centres, and the provision of Educational Films for School Children.

Much time and energy were given to planning for an Agricultural Training Centre and Land Settlement.

The West Indian negro wishes to have his own land, and if a stable, self-respecting community is to be built up, this factor, with the spirit of independence of which it is an illustration, is

probably the soundest foundation on which to make a start. Certainly the establishment of some type of self-respecting home life is likely to be the only successful method of solving one of Jamaica's greatest problems—sexual promiscuity and the resulting large number of ill-cared-for illegitimate children.

The private home, its care and its furnishing, has proved to be a vital stimulus towards social betterment; it is a tangible reward for industry, it spurs a man on to maintain and even to increase his wage-earning capacity. Without this objective a peasant settlement is likely to be cultivated to the barest minimum. Although groups of small holdings may not constitute the most efficient agricultural system, yet they may surely be rendered efficient in this respect by the development of co-operative methods.

The first Annual Report of the company expounds the reason for seeking to set up this Centre, and explains why the scheme was not put into operation.

Concerning the first of these, the Report points out that "The specific idea of the Agricultural Training Centre was to train persons in the work of developing small settlements, and it was intended that the trained personnel should be settled in the surrounding lands which would be attached to the Centre. Just after the first property had been acquired, the riots of 1938 broke out, and the Government announced its decision to introduce large-scale land settlements; it also became evident that the Government proposed to develop a number of practical training centres for boys and girls, where instruction would be given in agriculture and trades connected therewith. In view of these developments and of the great expenditure that this scheme entailed, the company abandoned its scheme, though with great reluctance." Efforts have, however, been made to keep in touch with the Government Lands Department, and one of the officers of the company has been seconded to help with the development of Settlers' Associations on selected Land Settlements.

Although the scheme was given up, the company decided to help two economic projects which promised to be of substantial benefit to the island. The company acquired financial interests in the *Bull Savannah* and *Manchester Tomato* projects in order to help to save a venture which had already given good results, and with the intention of becoming a substantial shareholder in *Jamaica Vegetables, Ltd.* The founder of the scheme and *Jamaica Welfare, Ltd.*, both planned that ultimately the growers

should become the owners of the business by the organization of a Co-operative Association. Already *Jamaica Welfare's* support has helped to establish a new and profitable industry in what was a very depressed agricultural community, and the yearly export of tomatoes by *Jamaica Vegetables, Ltd.*, now exceeds 30,000 lugs.

In another depressed area suited to the growing of cassava, *Jamaica Welfare* has become a shareholder in a company recently formed to make starch from the cassava. Here *Jamaica Welfare, Ltd.*, was influenced by the desire to establish an industry in a depressed rural area, to show how the cassava might be best cultivated, and to establish the best methods for the local manufacture of starch and other products of the cassava.

In addition, the company decided to explore the possibilities of developing the co-operative movement in Jamaica. The company's Report for 1938 stated that "The progress of Government plans for organized and controlled markets appeared to render it more necessary than ever that there should be a parallel development of co-operation, and it is clear . . . that this development ought not to be of Government origin or control". Two officers of the company were sent to England for training, while another spent three months studying co-operation in Nova Scotia, and they have already organized in the island a number of study groups, credit unions and small co-operative projects.

At the same time the company began its programme for the development of Community Centres, giving first consideration to rural areas where the small settlement dominated. Two districts were selected, and buildings were put up at the main centre, while branch centres were established in surrounding districts. The company's Report points out that "The organization of these Centres was to aim at developing local responsibility and control, while the company provided for each of the two main centres a trained male and female worker. The Centres were designed to provide an expanding programme embracing educational and recreational work and the development of co-operative study for the improvement of rural life in all respects."

The establishment of these two large Centres, in districts where hitherto there had been no facilities for culture and recreation, brought many benefits; the people gained new hope and developed new interests; gradually some began to show leadership as the responsibility of managing the Centre was thrown

upon them; and the Directors and Staff of the company gained much needed experience concerning the establishment and running of Community Centres.

Although the Centres have not used to the full the possibilities before them, their establishment led to the recognition throughout the whole island of the need for such Centres and the Government itself has now adopted a Social Service Scheme involving Community Centres as an integral part of Land Settlement Planning.

But, while the large Centres justified themselves as places for training workers, as show-places for the inspiration of other districts and as a focus for multifarious village activities, there were good reasons for refusing to increase their number. They proved costly to erect and to maintain; above all, they were not the result of the people's own interest and effort. The company therefore decided to seek to meet the great local demand for community centres by using available buildings (school-rooms or church halls) in country districts. As a result of negotiations between *Jamaica Welfare, Ltd.*, the Education Department and the churches, facilities have been accorded to the company: "Its policy is to promote local community centre associations, to provide for them a uniform constitution, to make small grants to furnish proper lighting (an essential of all leisure activities) and simple equipment. The organizing officers of the company assist in the elaboration of programmes for these affiliated centres, help in the training of local leadership, and in the general supervision and guidance of their activities".

At the same time an interesting experiment is being carried out in a few districts, where the village is encouraged to co-ordinate its efforts, to consider its problems, and to decide upon a plan for solving these problems. The slogan is "Building Better Villages", and the aim is the balanced development of the village. Leaders of any different organizations at work, such as church groups, citizens' associations, or cricket clubs, are enlisted, and a village committee is formed. This committee considers their problems, whether economic or cultural, and decides on a plan of action. The ultimate aim is a programme which will supply the needs of the various sections and age-groups somewhat as follows:

MALE

FEMALE

A

Child Welfare

	MALE	FEMALE
B		
8-14 years	Children in School	
	Wolf Cubs 8-12	Brownies 8-12
	Boy Scouts 12-14	Girl Guides 12-14
	Church Youth Movements	Church Youth Movements
	Boys' Brigade, etc.	Girls' Guildry, etc.
	4-H Clubs (10-14)	4-H Clubs (10-14)
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AFTER AGE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS		
C		
15-21 years	4-H Clubs (15-21)	4-H Clubs (15-21)
	Boy Scouts (15-18)	Girl Guides (15-18)
	Rover Scouts 18 up	Rangers 18 up
	Church Movements	Church Movements
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D		
22-28 years	Pioneer Clubs	Pioneer Clubs
	Rover Scouts	Ranger Guides
	Church Movements	
	Branches of the Jamaica Agricultural Society	
	Settlers' Associations	
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E		
28 up	Branches of the Jamaica Agricultural Society Settlers' Associations	Y.W.C.A. Church Guilds Jamaica Women's League

The Pioneer Clubs referred to in this list were developed to meet the needs of the young men of rural districts. A Club consists of 12 men with a Captain and Secretary; it works as a unit, undertaking projects somewhat in the manner of Four-H Clubs; members of the Club are expected to be of good conduct and character; their badge is the leaf of the Pimento, a tree indigenous to Jamaica.

Two illustrations will show how this scheme works. The village of Llandewey, in a depressed and backward area, formed a village committee, which decided that it would first try to meet a cultural need—the establishment of a recreation ground and the building of a pavilion which would also serve as a village hall. Two Pioneer Clubs were formed, and the people pledged themselves to cooperative effort.

Things immediately began to happen. A resident gave a site to be used as a cricket field at a rental of 1/- per annum; 40 men and 15 women pledged themselves to give labour and to collect materials for a building. On Saturdays the men felled trees and cleared and levelled the land, while women, boys

timber was collected and the site for the building lined out. As far as possible, native materials were used, and methods of construction suited to the district, so that the hall might serve as a model to those who should later build homes for themselves.

Jamaica Welfare, Ltd., made a small loan to the village committee, and matched with £1 of cash every £1 of materials or labour contributed. To-day the village has a good recreation field, and a community centre of which they might well be proud. The lessons learnt in doing this work will influence life in the village where attempts are now being made to demonstrate better methods of agriculture, and to establish small-stock breeding. Success in meeting a cultural need is helping the village to solve its economic problems; a neighbouring village has formed Pioneer Clubs, and has already made a Recreation Ground entirely by voluntary labour.

In another section of the island is situated the village of Walkerswood, a thickly populated area where the great need was economic—land. A Pioneer Club was formed, a small demonstration plot established, and the burning of a lime-kiln undertaken by co-operative effort to raise funds. The Pioneer Club made a survey of the district, showing the population, the number of small settlements and their size, and the number of people who were ready to purchase land on terms through the Government; contact was made with both the Jamaica Agricultural Society and the Government Lands Department, as well as with land-owners in the neighbourhood. A property was purchased by the Government and made available for Land Settlement. Now that the great economic need has been met, the village is seeking to meet its cultural needs. Here, then, was something vital; the energy was there, and this method released it; these Pioneer Clubs, working collectively, were able to undertake tasks before deemed impossible. It was a stimulating experience for a village which for so long had been apathetic; the people learned that they had the power to do things, and with these new methods came new energy for new tasks.

This method of organizing the village to meet its own needs (suggested by Brayne in his account of welfare work in Indian villages) has already had encouraging results, and probably the work of the company will be developed more and more along these lines. Each success brings further problems, demonstrating the need for training leaders and for developing

difficulties, this method, as we have pointed out, is proving a powerful stimulus to the building of a "better Jamaica", directing the energies of the group in united effort towards the accomplishment of definite projects, and providing a spiritual dynamic which will help greatly in the rural reconstruction of the island. The song of the Pioneer Clubs proves this:

There is a lovely island in the Caribbean seas,
 An island full of coconuts and fine banana trees,
 An island where the sugar-cane is waving in the breeze,
 Jamaica is its name.
 We're out to build a new Jamaica
 This Club of Pioneers.

This emphasis on the building of a new Jamaica by the united effort of a united people distinguishes this movement towards social betterment.

Further, just as the company subsidised one or two economic projects, so it aided certain institutions and organizations doing cultural work. A grant was made to the Institute of Jamaica for the establishment of a Free Library for Young People between the ages of ten and eighteen, and also for helping to establish a Museum closely related to the lives and occupations of the people. The company became partners with the Jamaica Agricultural Society in establishing 4-H clubs, to be modelled on the 4-H Club organizations which have done such important work in other lands. The Directors of *Jamaica Welfare, Ltd.* felt that "the future of the cooperative movement in Jamaica must depend on the better education in the broadest sense of the younger generation."

The scheme for the development of 4-H Clubs originated with the Agricultural Society, with which *Jamaica Welfare* joined in setting up an organization to direct activities and in sharing the financial burdens and responsibility of the work.

The third main line of development was the establishment of Cinema Units for the purpose of showing educational films to school children. After collaboration with the Director of Education, who welcomed the scheme, two units were set up in 1938, a third was added in 1939, and a fourth in 1940. These four units cover the island, giving shows four or five evenings a week during the school term at selected centres. The shows are attended by both children and adults at a charge of 1d and 3d respectively. About 60% of the audiences consist of children, and a wide variety of films are shown, some being

fairly closely related to the work of the schools, while others are of more general interest.

Some idea of the achievements and possibilities of this work can be given by reference to the Annual Report of Unit 3. "In 33 working weeks spent in the parishes of St. James, Hanover and Westmoreland, 78,628 persons, of whom nearly 50,000 were elementary school children, visited these shows; an average of nearly 500 per night, involving constant overcrowding of available accommodation. Lectures and pictures of broad educational value are followed with keen and increasing interest. Community singing, and essay and singing competitions in the schools, are warmly supported. Discipline on the whole is good, and teachers report that the children show a real effect of stimulus and understanding that reflects in their work".

Cinema Units, Community Centres, and the development of cooperation—these are some of the methods that are being used in the rural reconstruction of Jamaica. And although distance is not merely a matter of miles, and however far removed the little Jamaican village of Moseley Hall may be from Canada, the Dominion is influencing this Jamaican attempt at social welfare, both by economic benefits which it now grants to the West Indies and also by such examples of cooperation as those given by Nova Scotia.