

ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES

Caribbean society is the most artificial of societies. Here the colonial regime was not a matter of an indigenous economic system subverted by Aliens or an indigenous people subjected by Aliens. The indigenous system was wiped out, just as the indigenous people were virtually exterminated, making the region a geo-political entity without roots beyond Slavery.

This was a pure creation of colonialism – an implanted economic system run by settlers and transplanted peoples. Some came here to exploit. Others were brought here to be exploited. There was no common purpose or pretence of common purpose. The economic system was built on the most naked forms of exploitation. Its undisguised purpose was to provide a haven for high profits for metropolitan investors, profits which went into the building of their countries.

The growing effectiveness of political and labour organization of Blacks (Africans and Indians) brought some thin disguises to this pure ideology of exploitation in the early twentieth century. The idea that the economic system also had some responsibility for the needs of the people received official legitimacy – in word if not in deed.

But any material considerations for the people, higher wages, rights to join unions etc., which came out of their struggles, were seen as convenient tactics to maintain the system, not challenges to its basic rationale.

With the rise of nationalist governments, statements of purpose have changed completely. But the change is more in the rhetoric. In Trinidad and Tobago, Multinational Corporations still have a stranglehold on our basic resources. Their ownership is predominant and their control over all the major levers of the economy makes them masters of our destiny.

They are spread too, beyond the commanding heights of the economy through joint investments, agency arrangement and other forms of contract with local Big Business.

The expanding areas of government ownership add a new legal form, add some new tensions to the conflict between national and foreign interests. But the road we are on, producing less and less of our needs and wants, putting the economy on a basis of more complex technology, going in to far more costly projects, both to set up and to maintain, becoming more saturated with American culture and consumption values, this is tightening the vice of dependence.

The economy remains far removed not only from the control of the people but far removed from their needs. In an area as basic as employment, a large percentage of the labour force is caught up between unemployment and temporary employment (in

construction and URP or CEPEP projects). Social needs like housing do not fit into its operations as any priority. Inflation runs out of control, not just because of international conditions, but boosted by the free hand profit-mongers have to rip off the people.

Even the local position of workers is an indication of whom the economy is meant to serve. The Industrial Stabilization Act of 1965 was passed at a time when the major immediate concern was to assure foreign investors that the government could ensure a stable investment climate for them, even though it meant the suppression of the workers. The I.S.A. was followed by the Industrial Relations Act in 1972, restrictive labour legislation clearly designed to maintain the subordination of labour and check the strength of unions that do not find favour with the government or business.

The disadvantage of the workers' position in organizing to seek their rights is evidenced by the fact that two thirds of the labour force is unionized, and it is not because of a lack of effort by unions or lack of willingness by workers.

The relevance of the economic slogan of 1970 is becoming clear. The people are forced to cry out:

WE DO NOT WANT CRUMBS: WE WANT THE WHOLE BREAD.

Our approach to the economy has a major premise:

THE RESOURCES OF THE COUNTRY TO THE PEOPLE OF THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE TO BE USED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLE AS A WHOLE.

For this to have practical meaning.

OWNERSHIP BY THE PEOPLE MUST BE DOMINANT IN THE ECONOMY.

This is the only way for the people to feel that the country is really theirs. The same way a person feels pride in the individual ownership, say of a house, land or a business establishment, as a people we would feel national pride in owning collectively our basic economic resources, in owning collectively the institutions which govern the nerve centres of the economy. This is an important foundation of national identity which is now so dwarfed by the commanding Imperialist presence.

THE PEOPLE MUST EXERCISE EFFECTIVE CONTROL OVER THE ECONOMY.

This entails:

- 1) The participation in decision making and ultimate authority of the people over the key levers of overall economic control. The people must agree on:

- (a) What to Produce. The people need to decide what it is in their best interests to produce for the maximum welfare of the society. To what extent the economy must be geared to produce what the people need and want to consume. In what specific areas. To what extent and in what areas there should be concentration on exportation so that needs and wants not met directly by domestic production can be satisfied by Imports. Decisions of this kind determine the strength of the country and its potential for Independence. With the people responsible for decisions, food production would now have reached the level it is now, seeing how essential it is for Independence in the present international institution.
- (b) Technology. This is the single most critical factor in determining a country's chances to stand independent or become a satellite. It is also a major factor in how Man is affected in his relation to the economy. The people therefore need to seriously appraise questions like;
- The diversification of sources of technology for fuller employment, for closeness to the reach of national control, for a more human work environment. The use of creative technology, we develop ourselves, obviously a major priority;
- The effects of specific forms of technology on depersonalizing workers;
- The use of technology with considerations for the protection of the environment and health of the people.
- (c) The machinery and method of shaping consumption values. The dominance of the US in creating tastes in the society is both harmful culturally, because it robs us of thought and creativity in an important area of life, and harmful economically, because it increases our dependence on imports and stifles the potential of the domestic economy. Resources are wasted because there is no demand for what we can produce ourselves.

It is only by serious self-analysis and coming to terms with reality on the part of the people that anything can be done to changing the situation. It is important that we collectively develop and promote, through all available media, new values and approaches to consumption.

- (d) Methods and structures of Organizations. Systems of organization have a lot to do with the question even of the possibility of people's participation. In this society there are many systems of organization and forms of production (structures) that are de-signed to serve foreign control. In terms of structures, for example, there is the branch plant type firm that is dependent on the importation of almost completed goods to do the final processing. They are therefore tied to

specific inputs from specific firms. The people have to be involved in the process of shaping new systems of organization which embody the principles of people's control and must also make decisions on the forms of production relevant in the different areas of the economy.

Financial Policy. The allocation of money between different areas of the economy has tremendous effect both on production and consumption. Our experience over the years shows us where the policies of private banks have kept financial resources away from agriculture for example, while on the other hand, they have steered considerable resources into the inflated consumer spending patterns in the society, only marginally checked by the intervention of the Central Bank.

The use of foreign personnel – technical experts, consultants, managers, etc. If the people of this country collectively could have made decisions on this question the country would not be swamped the way it is now by foreigners directing everything. The people would have called on their own experts to tell them in what areas outside assistance is needed and why the 'government' would have had to justify going beyond that.

The direction of trade. (Imports and Exports). The people need to make the fundamental decisions here both from the point of view of maximum economic benefits as well as diversification with independence in mind.

For this authority here described to be meaningful:

The people must be involved in all areas of the planning process.

“Economic planning is not just FOR people, it is ABOUT people as much or more so than it is about physical resources like land and minerals...The relationship between our specialists (economists, Statisticians, technicians) and the workers (agricultural and industrial) can no longer be one where the specialists base plans exclusively on technical possibilities and expect the people to carry them out. The plans must combine the specialized data needed with the knowledge, experiences and desires of the people so that they will be an expression of the people's will”(quoted from 'Slavery to Slavery').

At the level of the firm the workers must participate in decision-making. It must be recognized that the dignity and self-esteem of an individual suffers when he or she is treated like another piece of equipment within the enterprise. People need not only to exercise the precise skills for the jobs they do. They need to use their creative intelligence to think beyond the narrow task, to its organization, the work relations, the total scheme of things it fits into. And this intelligence must contribute to decisions. The act of participation puts the Self in the job, builds up an identity within the worker with the whole process he/she is a part of. The participation has to be institutionalized. The alternative is the injury to the spirit of Man from alienation and mercenary involvement.

LABOUR MUST BE ORGANIZED AS A POSITIVE FORCE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

The growth of labour organization should be encouraged right through the economy. In the New Society labour organization need to go beyond the established concerns of bargaining for higher wages and better working conditions. These considerations, important in themselves, must be seen within the framework of workers taking up their responsibility to participate in decision making control at the level of the firm as well as at the national level. The major emphasis of organized labour then would be the economic development of the country, ensuring this development so that workers' rights can be protected and their conditions improved.

THE ECONOMY MUST BE GEARED TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF ALL THE PEOPLE.

The present system of control and values caters to the satisfaction of a few, no matter how obscene, and wider benefits are either incidental or wrung through bitter struggle. The motive force of economic activity now must no longer be profit to a few but the satisfaction of the needs of the people.

WORK MUST BE SEEN AS A RIGHT OF EVERY CITIZEN.

One of the great tragedies this society suffered was the effect of the most exploitative forms of labour in human history, the legacy of which is an ingrained concept of work as a burden. People should in fact have an urge to work, to produce, to build their society, Man cannot find spiritual fulfillment without working.

On the material level too, people need the rewards of labour. Therefore it must be seen as a failure of society when it leaves its members to suffer the pains of unemployment.

EACH INDIVIDUAL MUST SEE IT AS HIS OR HER RESPONSIBILITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE MAXIMUM OF HIS OR HER TALENT,

It is the people who have to make it possible for the society to fulfill its obligations to all. Therefore each individual must see it as his duty to do his best for his own good and the good of all. Rights are guaranteed by the acceptance of the responsibilities which go with them

ECONOMIC SECURITY MUST BE GUARANTEED TO ALL.

In a society based on Man there can be no discards. If say, age or ill health prevent individuals from producing, the society is responsible for the maintenance of a dignified life standard for them.