

THE HISTORY OF ARROWROOT PRODUCTION IN
BARBADOS AND THE CHALKY MOUNT
ARROWROOT GROWERS' ASSOCIATION,
A PEASANT MARKETING EXPERIMENT THAT
FAILED ¹

By

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INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that sugar has always been the life blood of Barbadian economy. However, over the years, and with varying emphasis, Barbados has produced and exported a variety of minor cash crops. Although these crops have always played a limited role in the island's economy, some of them were important features in the economic life of the villages in which they were grown. Arrowroot is one such crop and Chalky Mount, in the Scotland District, one such Village. Furthermore, the production of arrowroot starch was at the core of the first attempt in Barbados to provide an organisation for the processing and marketing of a crop produced by small farmers or "peasants." The Chalky Mount Arrowroot Growers' Association (C.M.A.G.A.), which had a short life span from 1936 to about 1942, was this organisation.

In this paper, it is my purpose to record something of the history of arrowroot production in Barbados and to discuss the methods and techniques employed in its production and conversion to starch by small farmers. I will then chronicle the short life of the C.M.A.G.A., often called a "co-operative" in Government reports, describe its organisation and problems, and offer some explanation for its demise. Although this paper is offered as a contribution to one aspect of Barbadian agricultural history, it is hoped that the lessons learned from the failure of the C.M.A.G.A. might be applicable in helping to guide the formation of future peasant associations on the island.

A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF ARROWROOT PRODUCTION IN BARBADOS

On the available facts, the history of arrowroot production in Barbados can only be sketched. According to Dr. David Watts, who has done considerable research on plants introduced to the island during the 17th and 18th. centuries, arrowroot (*Maranta Arundinacea*) was first identified in Barbados in 1690, but from where and when it was introduced cannot be ascertained at present.² Hughes mentions the plant, but other than stating its use as a food and starch and telling us it is reaped in February, he says little else (1750: 221—222). Rolph mentions the crop as being grown by white tenants and negroes in the Scotland District (1836: 49, 52) and, in general, it appears that at least by the 1830's, arrowroot was already a well established crop in Barbados, but restricted in its cultivation to certain parts of the Scotland District. It was grown by both negroes and poor whites on their small holdings. There is no evidence that the crop was ever cultivated by plantations (cf. Davy 1854: 149; Rolf 1836: 52; Schomburgk 1848: 83), yet arrowroot was produced in sufficient quantities for export. Export quantities are printed in newspapers of the period, and Schomburgk even mentions arrowroot as one of the "chief staple articles produced in Barbados for export" (1848: 83). Arrowroot cash value was such that, for instance, the Editor of *The Barbadian* newspaper of March 22, 1833, advised his readers that the crop would be accepted in lieu of cash for subscriptions due.

Sometime between the 1850's and 1880's arrowroot production apparently declined and starch was no longer exported. Moxly's account, which indicates this state of affairs, also offers the earliest definitive statement I was able to find of a well established, albeit small-scale, arrowroot cultivation and starch processing industry at Chalky Mount and its environs.

It is in this district...that, on patches among the hills, too small and with soil of too poor a nature for the successful cultivation of sugar cane...arrowroot is grown, and the manufacture of this article forms one of the minor industries.... The manufacture of the article (i. e., starch) is not of so great proportions as to supply any for exportation (1866: 100—102).

In the ensuing years, although arrowroot continued to be grown in some Scotland District villages, the crop is rarely mentioned in official reports. Skeete, in his pioneer study *The Condition of Peasant Agriculture in Barbados* (1930), only makes passing references to arrowroot and offers no details on its production, and Starkey

(1939), in his comprehensive discussion of agricultural conditions in the early and mid 1930's, omits any mention of arrowroot. Omissions such as these indicate the very minor role of arrowroot in the island's economy, yet it was a major small farmer crop in the Chalky Mount area and its vicinity during this period.

Around the mid 1930's the government began a campaign to encourage small farmers to grow minor cash crops, among them arrowroot, to enable them to decrease their dependency upon sugar cane whose price was faltering (Colonial Reports 1939; 13). At this time there was an increase in arrowroot production in Scotland District villages, the C. M. A. G. A. was formed in 1936, and arrowroot yields and other relevant data are given in government reports until 1942, while the arrowroot factory was in operation at Chalky Mount (see below). After 1942, there is very sparse information on the crop, indicating its production decline again, and in Halcrow and Cave's comprehensive report *Peasant Agriculture in Barbados* (1947), which is based upon agricultural conditions in the mid 1940's there is no mention of the crop. Arrowroot continued to drop in importance in Scotland District villages even though it was still being grown, albeit on a declining scale, in Chalky Mount and the vicinity where, throughout the 1940's, it continued to be a major cash crop of the small farmers. By the early 1950's, arrowroot had been largely supplanted by sugar cane.

Although geographical conditions in many of the more rugged parts of the Scotland District were not the best for cane production, the decreased market for starch and the arduous labour involved in its production combined with the higher and guaranteed prices on sugar cane (largely brought about by the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement) plus improved marketing and transport facilities for peasant cane were the primary factors responsible for this shift in crop emphasis. For instance, in the mid 1930's there were over 45 arrowroot growers in the Chalky Mount vicinity with a minimum of 45 acres of land devoted to the crop (see note 5). In 1962, only 10 persons were growing arrowroot on a combined area of about 3 acres. Some of these persons did not bother to harvest the crop, and of those who produced starch most of them kept about half for household use. Today, probably very few people in Barbados are aware of the fact that arrowroot is still grown on the island, although at the time of writing (1965) even less is being grown than in 1962.

With this brief historical sketch of arrowroot production on the island, we may now look at the techniques employed by the small farmer in his traditional arrowroot production activities.

For the following section I rely largely upon my own field observations in the Chalky Mount area and conversations with older persons in the vicinity for whom arrowroot growing had formerly been an important activity.

ARROWROOT PRODUCTION IN CHALKY MOUNT AREA DURING THE 1930's

The Chalky Mount area affords a good example for an examination of peasant arrowroot production in the Scotland District (see note 4). The hardiness of the arrowroot plant made it well adapted to the often poor and shallow soil conditions that prevail in many sections of the Scotland District. For example, in the gullies and on the eroded hillsides of the Chalky Mount area arrowroot found a home — there is no way of telling at present how long ago it was introduced but it was certainly being grown by at least the mid-19th. century.

Only one crop of arrowroot was produced each year. As the leaves began to dry and turn brown the root was ready for harvesting. A hoe — or fork if the ground was hard — was used to extract the root from the soil. Shoots broken off the arrowroot rhizomes, were left in the soil and new plants easily propagated from these. In fact, the harvesting of the root and the planting of the shoots was, in most cases, a continual process. Land was normally not allowed to lie fallow, so that persons who grew arrowroot continued to reap the same acreage each year. After being harvested, the roots were placed in sacks which were then headed to the spot where the starch was to be made.

Formerly, the roots were usually processed in the gullies where spring water was available. Later, as standpipes were introduced in the village, the root processing was done near the grower's house. For many years the major device employed in crushing the root to a pulp was a wooden mortar and pestle; in fact, some of these can still be found in houses in the village. Moxly (1886: 101) reports small windmills being used, but no informant recalls these in his lifetime, nor at Chalky Mount.³ Sometime, presumably in the early part of the 20th. century, the "machine" as it is called in the Chalky Mount area, was introduced. Moxly's account does not mention such a machine, and, although older informants today are vague as to when this machine supplanted the mortar and pestle, they all testify to the fact that, as children, only the mortar and pestle were used.

This machine, which is still employed today, is simply a wooden carriage which supports a small, deep trough underneath

and a rotary grater above. The grater has a crank handle on either side, and as the root is pushed against it, the grater is kept moving through the manual efforts of a pair of men — by each turning a crank handle. Usually four persons work on the machine and these often change positions, for turning the heavy grater is considered extremely fatiguing and it is rare to find the same man continuously expending his energy for more than a stretch of 15 minutes or so. Two men then, operated the grater, a third fed roots against it and the fourth supplied the third with roots. These men, usually including the grower himself, were often the same persons who harvested the crop.

There is no disagreement among informants that grinding the root into starch was an extremely laborious procedure exceeding, by comparison, the cutting and heading of cane. The excessive labour involved in producing starch, born of the technological limitations of the local industry, was an important element in the growers' initial response and reaction to the establishment of an arrowroot processing factory at Chalky Mount. This will be dealt with in a subsequent section.

The grinding process produced a large pulp mass which fell into the water-filled wooden trough underneath the grater. The arrowroot starch was then extracted from this pulp mass. Although harvesting and grinding the root was normally a man's job, women were primarily responsible for washing the pulp and extracting the starch. Porous cloths, serving as sieves, were pulled over hogsheads and the pulp squeezed and washed so that the water-laden starch dropped into the hogshead below, the sieve retaining the pulp which was later fed to pigs. After the starch settled at the base of the hogshead, the water was poured out and the starch rung by twisting in a dry cloth. The damp starch was then laid out on sheets to dry in the sun. When completely dry it was ready for storage and/or selling.

The starch, a portion of which was normally retained by the producing household for its own use, was usually hawked in town and/or countryside by household members, or, sold directly to hawkers or shops. As in production, so each household was responsible for its own distribution.

Informants state that "in the old days" efforts were made to harvest the arrowroot prior to the onset of the cane harvest, but invariably the plant was harvested during the cane harvest as well. Not only did many of the arrowroot growers labour on neighbouring estates, but also households were dependent upon outside labour for arrowroot harvesting and processing. The comments that some government officials made during the days of the C.M.A.G.A.,

imply that all of the work was performed by non-paid member of the grower's households are not true. In many cases households could not provide the labour force for the more arduous aspects of the work and consequently had to rely upon persons from other households. There was no such thing as co-operative or communal labour groups, and, although there was some "swapping change" or exchange labour between individuals, there is a ready consensus by informants that the majority of inter-household working relationships were formed, as they are today in cash producing activities, on a cash basis (Cf. Handler 1965: 23—28). Working on the plantations first, prior to harvesting one's arrowroot crop, helped in providing the cash needed for paid labourers. At any rate, not one elder informant interviewed along these lines claims anything other than he or she had to "pay people" to help harvest and process the root, though it is quite conceivable that there was also more of a dependency upon non-paid household labour as well in those days.

In sum, non-pecuniary co-operative efforts in arrowroot production were minimal, each household being responsible for the processing and selling of its own starch. The cottage nature of this industry was thus one of its most fundamental social and economic features.

With this survey of the small farmers' production techniques serving as background we can now proceed to examine the origin growth, and decline of the C.M.A.G.A.

THE CHALKY MOUNT ARROWROOT GROWERS' ASSOCIATION: A CHRONICLE OF EVENTS⁴

The key role that the Island of St. Vincent was to play in the formation of the C.M.A.G.A. was first made apparent in late 1934, through a series of letters from the St. Vincent Arrowroot Association (which frequently advertised its starch in Barbadian newspapers) to the Barbados Government. These letters requested a lowering of the import tariffs of Barbados on St. Vincent starch. Replies from Barbados stressed that arrowroot was only grown on a very small scale in the Scotland District and that tariff alterations thus would not affect Barbadian producers. I do not know for certain if the tariff was lowered, but this seems likely for on May 18th., 1935, a petition was forwarded to the Colonial Secretary of Barbados, which requested that a "tariff be imposed on imported starches so as to protect the local industry." This petition was signed by approximately 34 Chalky Mount small farmers who claimed that they were forced to sell their starch at a loss on the Barbadian market because St. Vincent starch sold at prices with which the Chalky Mount producer could not compete. The petition also

stated that there was more acreage in St. Andrew which could be converted to arrowroot, were it profitable to do so, but competition from St. Vincent prevented this expansion. It should be recalled that this petition came at a time when the Barbados Government was trying to encourage small farmers to grow crops other than sugar cane.

In response to this petition, ^{THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE INSTITUTED} ~~there was~~ an inquiry into arrowroot production in Barbados. The report which resulted from this inquiry noted that most of the arrowroot growers in Barbados were in Chalky Mount, but that there were as well growers in other villages in the parishes of St. Andrew and St. Joseph. The report also pointed out that Barbadian arrowroot starch was inferior to the product of St. Vincent, that it could be improved, especially in these places "...which by their situation are unsuitable for sugar cane cultivation..." and that "...in order to produce a better article..." it would be necessary to put up funds for the erection of a small factory at Chalky Mount.⁵ Thus, in a letter dated May 31, 1935, the Chalky Mount petitioners were informed, ^{BY THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE} that higher tariffs would not be imposed on St. Vincent starch, but if the farmers of the village "...will form an Arrowroot Growers Association the Governor-in-Executive Committee will be prepared to approach the legislature for a small loan to be made to the association for the erection of a small factory along modern lines." Although I am unaware as to who in Government was responsible for this suggestion, the suggestion nonetheless precipitated the formation of the C.M.A.G.A.

The Department of Agriculture sent some of its staff members among whom was Mr. C. A. Coppin, the Government Analyst, to organise the Chalky Mount producers. Faced with a competitive market and limited technology for overcoming this competition many, but not all, of the growers were apparently initially receptive to the idea of a factory. By July 1935, ^{THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE COMMENCED} inquiries had begun into the cost involved in the erection of a factory and the conditions necessary for its establishment. In 1936, Mr. Coppin visited St. Vincent in order to make a survey of its arrowroot industry. His report on the St. Vincent industry, dated April 27, 1936, served as a model for the Barbadian development. A few months later, on September 16, 1936, the C.M.A.G.A. was formally constituted and its rules adopted.⁶ The Association, whose structure will be delineated in the next section, was to purchase arrowroot directly from the growers, and then process it into starch at its own factory. The starch would then be sold to a major distributor in Bridgetown. The distributor, who was ideally supposed to enjoy a monopoly in starch produced by the factory, in turn was to put up the operating capital for the factory's operations on a year to year basis (see below, letter from Bryden & Sons).

Two months afterwards the C.M.A.G.A. requested a £450 loan from the Government for the purchase of an arrowroot starch factory. In February 1937, the Legislature granted the loan, but in its debate raised the issue as to whether the Department of Agriculture would have any active control over the factory "to insure its proper running." The Colonial Secretary replied, in effect, that the Department of Agriculture would not have official control, but he expressed his confidence in the factory's future, because the "Director of the Department of Agriculture is so much involved in the Association." The participation of members of the Department of Agriculture in the C.M.A.G.A. is an important point which will be dealt with again in the final section of this paper.

In early 1937, the late J. A. Haynes, then a prominent Scotland District land owner, leased a marginal parcel of his Cambridge plantation at Chalky Mount to the Association. The factory was constructed on this land and by the end of 1937 or early in 1938 it was completed. On March 2, 1938, the factory commenced its first year's grinding activities (Department of Science & Agriculture, Annual Report 1937—1938: 79).

The optimism that prevailed during that first year seemed to continue on into the following year (Cf. Department of Science and Agriculture, Annual Report 1938—1939) but in the third year of factory operations signs are already apparent that all is not well: the yield of starch from the roots is low, but also

The small quantity of roots received is also very disappointing: this is partially due to the somewhat adverse weather conditions this year, *but more particularly to the lack of co-operation between the members who constitute the Association; thus, some arrowroot was privately manufactured by members of the Association themselves* (Department of Science & Agriculture, Annual Report 1939—1940: 8, my italics).

The Department of Science & Agriculture's Annual Report for 1940—1941 is somewhat more optimistic for higher and better quality starch yields were obtained that year; nevertheless the report notes that:

This experiment in co-operative peasant production indicates that the support and encouragement by officers of the Department of Agriculture over a period of years is essential for success (Department of Science & Agriculture, Annual Report, 1940—1941: 3).

Furthermore, the report attributes the efficiency of factory operations to "*the greater measure of assistance and control which*

the Department has exercised in the affairs of the association, both in the field and factory" (Department of Science & Agriculture, Annual Report 1940—1941: 10, my italics). Yet, during 1941—1942 it is apparent from a variety of letters, creditors' statements, etc., that the Association is experiencing serious financial difficulties. For example, a letter dated October 21, 1941, from A. S. Bryden & Sons (who were the distributors for the factory's starch) to the Association's Secretary, offers much revealing information about the condition of the factory and Association at the time:

We have, for some time, been very worried about the great difficulty we are experiencing in making sales of your arrowroot. . . . When we first handled arrowroot for your Association we were able to sell fair quantities to the Roebuck Street traders, who in turn distributed the Arrowroot to the shops all over the island. At that time most of the arrowroot that was manufactured on the island passed through our hands and any small sales which might have been made by producers outside the Association were of negligible volume and had very little effect on the sales made by us.

It has become increasingly difficult to make sales through the regular trade channels in Bridgetown, and we find that firms who used to handle eight or ten bags a year are now only handling two or three, and many others who used to handle two or three bags a year for the most part discontinued handling any arrowroot.

From enquiries we have made, *we find that the reason for this change in the marketing of Arrowroot is due to the fact that during this year only about one-third of the total quantity of roots produced on the island were sent to the Association's plant: the arrowroot from the remaining two-thirds was consequently manufactured by private individuals and marketed all over the island, in most cases direct to the shopkeepers.* In this way these small producers have been in a position to cut out the legitimate profit made by the wholesale distributor in Bridgetown and thus obtain for themselves what appears to be a slightly higher price. . . .

. . . . we think it advisable to state at the present time that under present circumstances it is not our intention to make advances to you against next year's crop.

Our reason for this is that we have come to the conclusion that it will not be a sound business proposition to carry on as we have in the past, unless some arrangement can be made which will ensure 100% co-operation among all the producers of Arrowroot so that the entire output of the island is passed through the Association and marketed in an orderly manner which will prevent the type of price cutting which has been carried on by the small outside producers (my italics).

It is to be noted that capital advances were a *sine qua non* for factory operations. Without these advances to pay employees and to purchase roots the factory could not operate; thus, Bryden's refusal to advance operating capital was a severe blow to factory operations. In this sense, then, the C.M.A.G.A. was not a co-operative as that word is commonly understood for its membership did not put up "risk capital," an aspect of co-operatives which is fundamental to their organisation and operations.

That there was a further deterioration in the Association's marketing position was made clear in a somewhat pessimistically worded letter from Dr. S. J. Saint, the new Director of Agriculture, to the Colonial Secretary. In this letter, dated January 12, 1942, Dr. Saint pointed out that none of the principal nor interest on the £450 Government loan had been paid, that the factory would certainly not operate during 1942, and probably not in future years as well. This latter prediction was made because "the gross revenue is too small to pay the salary of an efficient manager." Saint doubted the possibility of increasing this revenue "without considerably increasing the area under arrowroot, persuading all growers to send their roots to the factory, and building up an export industry in competition with St. Vincent." Saint equally doubted the possibility of these conditions coming about.

Appended to Saint's letter was his unpublished report entitled "The Chalky Mount Arrowroot Grower's Association Outlining the Present Position of the Association." Among other matters, the report reviewed the events which led to the formation of the C.M.A.G.A. and the factory. According to Saint:

From the inception of the Association the Department of Agriculture has done everything possible to make a success of this *first co-operative effort in peasant agriculture*. In 1938 and 1939, officers of the Department of Agriculture gave close supervision to the operation of the factory and an excellent starch was produced. It was felt, however, that the Department could not continue indefinitely to give time and full scale assistance to the Association; hence, in 1940,

the supervision of the operation of the factory was left to the co-operative efforts of the members of the Association and officers of the Department paid only advisory visits from time to time (*my italics*).

The difficulties the factory was experiencing during 1940 — difficulties pointed out above — are mentioned by Saint. He also adds that

It was... found that considerable dissatisfaction and disaffection was evident amongst the members by the end of the crop season and the co-operative spirit which the Department of Agriculture had endeavoured to foster was conspicuous by its absence.

Further, and this is of key significance to an assessment of the whole affair,

The members of the Association have always been primarily interested in the price which was to be paid for their roots. *They have regarded the factory as a Government concern which should buy roots in the same way as a sugar factory buys cane.* Although this matter has been explained over and over again *the members appear unable or unwilling to appreciate that the factory is a non-profit making organisation belonging to the Association* (*my italics*).

Saint then reports that only about one-third of the arrowroot grown on the island is processed by the factory, the remainder being processed and sold by the growers themselves. This fundamental handicap to the factory's operations could only be overcome, he said, if the factory was to receive all or practically of all the roots grown on the island. But,

There seems to be little prospect of obtaining co-operation of all the arrowroot producers in this way and it is therefore evident that the Chalky Mount Arrowroot Growers' Association will cease to function since it is unlikely that any other firm will be found willing to finance the factory operations under present conditions.... Under the existing circumstances it seems doubtful whether the local factory can ever be satisfactorily operated as a co-operative peasant concern. *In my view, the small holder and his family will receive better payment for their labour, if the arrowroot is grown, manufactured and sold on the basis of a cottage industry.* In this way, not only does the small holder receive payment for the growing of the

roots but the manufacture and sale of the starch will be undertaken by members of the family and result in additional income (*my italics*).

Presenting production costs and figures to support the above statement, Saint concludes his report with the following:

Without the co-operative marketing of all locally produced starch, it would seem that the product of the local factory could only be sold remuneratively by eliminating the competition of the St. Vincent product which it approximates in quality. This would mean either prohibiting or placing a high duty on the importation of other starches but there seems no adequate reason why Government should subsidize the local factory product in this way.

The above report, it should be noted again, is dated January 12, 1942. The factory did not operate that year nor any year thereafter having had a short productive life of four seasons, from 1938 to 1941.

The aftermath of the factory's cessation of operations was not devoid of some bitterness. A House of Assembly debate on June 25th., 1942⁷, offers an example of the atmosphere that seemed to exist in official circles, and the general attitude towards what seemed, at the time, to be the primary reasons underlying the failure of the factory. In this debate, the Government acknowledged that it, "through the Department of Agriculture, encouraged the peasants in the Chalky Mount district to grow arrowroot" and that the factory was established under "government auspices." However, Mr. Walcott, who spoke for the Government, was careful to point out that "any decision as to the future operations of the factory is one that would have to be made by the owners of the factory, that is the Association." Mr. Walcott also maintained that the factory was idle at the time because the "Association has been unable to obtain the necessary cash advances to operate."

Mr. Ramsey, whose questions precipitated Mr. Walcott's comments, retorted:

I have a sad feeling. The people of the Chalky Mount district have not answered up to all that have been asked of Government for them. They have acted as children. They want to be spoon fed. . . . The government has done everything that is possible in their power to make this arrowroot industry a success, and the people of this district have failed to co-operatethese people have sat idly by, and are coming round asking people for help although

the help was offered them. I am sorry for them, but this is a type of treatment they are getting for failing to help themselves.

Another Member, Mr. Springer, asserted his general approval of Ramsey's remarks. After having made his own "inquiries" Mr. Springer concluded that if the C.M.A.G.A.

....had taken the trouble and initiative to meet together and come to a decision apart from the assistance of the Department of Agriculture, *the members of whose staff are members of the Association*, it would have been possible for them to have obtained the necessary advance in cash to proceed to work. But they had got into the habit of relying upon these government officers to do things for them, and had not learnt the need of doing things for themselves... until they and other people in similar positions are prepared to take upon themselves some of the responsibility necessary for their success they have no right to blame.... anybody.... for their troubles (my italics).

Nevertheless, Springer felt that the blame, if it can be termed such, did not rest with the people of Chalky Mount alone. He was convinced that "in spite of the neglect and apathy of the arrowroot growers" the factory could have continued operations, for some merchant in town [who is unnamed by Springer] offered to advance cash for the factory operations with the condition that he be entitled to purchase the starch that was produced. Springer claimed that this offer was refused by persons within the Department of Agriculture, persons who were as well members of the C.M.A.G.A.'s Committee of Management (see below). In Springer's words

While the major portion of the blame is to be attached to the arrowroot growers themselves.... I cannot feel that the officials concerned in that department [Agriculture] who turned down this offer were acting in the best interests of the arrowroot growersI mention that because I do not think the entire blame rests with the peasants (~~my parentheses~~).

Springer's comments are of interest for they point to a difficult thing to explain without seriously questioning the motives of at least some members of the Association's Committee of Management. For, if it was true that a potential distributor had offered his capital to keep the factory running, why was such an offer turned down? And why would an investor place his money in a business

proposition as poor as some officials claimed it to be? These questions, at present must remain unanswered.

At any rate, by August 1942, with its unused machinery deteriorating, the factory was dismantled and its parts taken away. Although the factory was legally the property of the C.M.A.G.A., the Acting Director of Agriculture, in a letter to the Colonial Secretary dated 13, August 1942, justified his action by saying that the machinery "was purchased by the Association by a loan from the Government, neither any repayment on capital nor interest having been made on the loan."

On October 10, 1942, Mr. C. A. Coppin, the Government Analyst, informed the Colonial Secretary that the government had formally purchased, at a cost much less than the original, the machinery and buildings which were part of the arrowroot factory, and notified the secretary that "This equipment will be used in the erection and ^{A FITTING} equipment of the Government cassava factory" at Lancaster, St. James.

With this letter we find the Department of Agriculture beginning to embark upon a new venture. Ironically, this venture was ultimately to involve some of the people of the Chalky Mount area as the cassava factory, in the late 1940's, evolved into an experimental pottery factory, which for a while employed Chalky Mount potters. Some of these potters, years before, had belonged to the C.M.A.G.A.

With the dismantling of the factory and the sale of its parts the cycle of birth to death of the Association was completed, and File No. 20 in the archives of the Department of Science and Agriculture contains no other significant entries. The ruins of the factory—the cement foundations of the washing tubs employed in arrowroot processing — remain on the land owned at that time by Mr. J. A. Haynes and today by the present owners of Cambridge plantation. They are located about 75 yards north of the intersection of the Chalky Mount and Less Beholden roads.

Before attempting some analysis of this whole affair, it is necessary to sketch in some features of the C.M.A.G.A.'s formal structure and organisation.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE CHALKY MOUNT ARROWROOT GROWERS' ASSOCIATION⁸

The objectives of the C.M.A.G.A., are explicitly stated in the organisation's rules, yet, within these rules there is a singular lack of the word "co-operative." This is important, for contrary to assumptions prevailing at the time, the Association was not formally constituted as a co-operative. The Association, according to the objectives set forth in its rules, was to "seek out and exploit the

best markets for the disposal of the various grades of Arrowroot grown in the island, and to appoint an agent or agents for the disposal of the product." There were some other less fundamental orientations, but it is apparent that the Association was primarily constituted as a marketing device for factory produced starch.

Membership of the Association was open only to *bona fide* arrowroot growers who, as members, were obliged to deliver all their arrowroot to the factory, and who agreed to market their starch through the Association. Members were also asked to notify the Association's Secretary annually as to the number of acres they intended to plant, the dates of such planting, and the proposed date of reaping. Any alterations in the amount of acreage devoted to the crop were to "be approved by the Committee of Management." In addition, members were required to deliver to the factory only roots which they had grown themselves, the breaking of this rule having the possible consequence of expulsion from the Association "at the discretion of the Committee of Management." There was an "entrance fee of six pence" plus a two shilling annual subscription. Obviously, dues such as these would barely suffice for annual expenses in operating the Association and would hardly begin to approach the "risk capital" which is a fundamental aspect of any co-operative. Voting rights in general meetings could be relinquished in the event that a member's annual subscription was three months in arrear.

It is apparent from the rules that the Committee of Management was the Association's all important governing body. What was the nature and scope of its authority?

According to the Association's rules, the Committee of Management was to be elected annually at a general membership meeting. The Committee, which only needed four of its members to form a quorum, was comprised of 11 persons: these included the Association's chairman, secretary, and treasurer plus "three members appointed from the Department of Agriculture with the permission of the Governor," the "rector of the Parish of St. Andrew" and 4 others. It seems apparent that not all of these were *bona fide* arrowroot growers.

Aside from a number of minor rules which governed its functioning, the Committee of Management had the "power to expend the funds of the Association" and was responsible for conducting its business and general affairs. The Committee was given particular authority in 13 specified areas relating to business affairs. Although these areas of authority are important in terms of the Association's organisation, space limitations prevent their being outlined here. However, most of these, in one way or another, were subsumed under the thirteenth area of authority which empowered the Committee of Management to negotiate and act on

behalf of the Association "as they may consider expedient for or in relation to any of the matters aforesaid (i.e., the thirteen areas) or otherwise for the purpose of the Association." Thus, it appears from the rules that virtually all operational and business decisions could be made by the Committee of Management, only four members of this Committee had to be present in order to make such decisions, and it was conceivable that none of these members need have been peasants themselves.

Aside from the thirteen "powers," the Committee approved or rejected all membership applications, could expel members, and had the final decision in the arbitration of all disputes internal to the organisation. In addition, the Association's rules authorised the Committee to utilize all monies collected from entrance fees and annual subscriptions to pay the Association's expenses. Other monies were to be used for the payment of principal and interest on loans, and any surplus funds were "to be allocated in such manner as the Committee of Management direct, and especially to the creation of a Reserve Fund."

The Association's rules also delineate the duties of the Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer, and specify that an annual general meeting of the membership should be held within one month of the end of each financial year. There are also provisions made for the holding of "Special General Meetings" when at least 10 members of the Association request one. At least two-thirds vote of all members present at a General Annual Meeting or any Special Meeting was required to effect any changes in the rules.

Such then, were the more salient features of the C.M.A.G.A.'s rules. The Committee of Management was clearly the fundamental cog in the Association's wheel, even more so than the rules themselves would indicate. Its position with respect to the rest of the Association's membership, and the nature of its composition, is crucial, I believe, to an understanding of whatever direction and difficulties the Association had. For much as they may have tried, the more important leaders in the Committee of Management were never able to fully convince the majority of the Association's membership that the factory belonged to the Association and that the Association itself was a device operating solely for the benefit of the rank and file peasant producer. It is to these issues that we now turn in concluding this paper.

DISCUSSION

It is obvious that in most organisations the majority of the membership does not take an active part in running the organization's affairs. The C.M.A.G.A. was no exception to this rule. Thus, the Association's by-laws allocated broad authority to the

Committee of Management. However, the most active and knowledgeable leaders within the Committee were not peasants, but members of a social stratum quite different than the one to which the peasants belonged. Class distinctions are a fundamental element of the social fabric of Barbados, and the social distance between various classes was perhaps even greater during the 1930's than it is today. Thus, it is clear that the majority of the Association's membership was quite divorced from its leadership in both outlook and way of life — and the testimonies of peasants who were members of this Association bear further witness to this important social difference.

One illustration of the above can be found in the following: in 1962 a highly placed official in the Department of Agriculture recalled for me the meeting which was held at the Chalky Mount School for the purpose of deciding upon a Committee of Management. According to this [^]information, the organizers of the meeting, who [^] were primarily members of the Department of Agriculture, unable to stimulate local participation in the meeting did their own nominating from among themselves. My informant was emphatic that the villagers participated very little and passively voted for the nominees. This behaviour is not difficult to understand. In the presence of strangers or outsiders, especially those of a *higher social stratum*, it is not unlikely that the villagers were more inarticulate than they are now; even today they will not readily divulge their true feelings in public meetings of this kind. Adding to this their almost total lack of experience with organizations and their workings, voting procedures and the like, it is relatively easy to appreciate their lack of participation at the meetings. ^ INFORMANT

From the Association's beginnings, then, a significant element of its leadership was in the hands of "outsiders," but the situation probably could not have been otherwise. Secular leadership patterns in the community then, as today, were poorly developed and the community then, as today, possessed few social mechanisms by which it, or significant parts of it, could operate as a communal or co-operative unit on a long term basis. Thus, at least from the start, it was essential that affairs be conducted by experienced persons who could deal with legal affairs, arrange loans, make contracts with dealers, and even draft the Association's rules (which were so worded that, given the peasants' educational background and experience, they would have been very difficult to comprehend); and it was also necessary that these leaders, by virtue of their class positions, be able to move with relative ease through various business and governmental segments of Barbados society.

In sum, effective leaders had to come from outside the villages and the Association — as with similar organisations today in Chalky Mount and comparable villages in Barbados — was from its very

inception caught upon the horns of a dilemma. In order for the Association to accomplish its ends, however, these ends were to be defined, there had to be active and knowledgeable leaders, but the community was unable to provide such leaders when needed; thus, leaders would be in the precarious position of being "outsiders," by virtue of their class position and residence, with respect to the peasants whose cooperation and confidence they needed.

As far as the majority of peasants was concerned the Association was a government affair; if not *de jure*, certainly *de facto*. All evidence points to the conclusion that the vast majority of those arrowroot growers who were members of the Association (and not all of them were) did not view it as their Association *per se*. That is, although outside criticism focused upon the inability of the Chalky Mount producers to cooperate with one another in support of "their" Association, there is practically no indication that the peasants viewed the Association in the same terms. Government participation in the Association was an actual fact in terms of its precipitating role in the start of the Association (it will be recalled that the fundamental condition that Government placed upon helping the arrowroot grower was that he form an Association), but, even more important, government funds permitted the construction of the factory and high officials in the Department of Agriculture were in key leadership positions in the Association and actively involved in its affairs.

In other words, the Association (and its factory) was from the beginning and throughout its life, heavily imbued with Government participation. Government in those days was viewed as a monolithic source of power though sometimes paternalistic in its dealings with the poorer citizenry. For this reason the peasants turned to Government in 1935 to raise the tariffs on St. Vincent starch. This was the totality of the request they made of Government and in this petition it is apparent that they were trying to help themselves. Although no peasants were solely dependent upon the sale of starch for a livelihood, the sales nonetheless contributed to their small annual incomes. Thus the peasants were intent upon making a living and protecting their meagre existence. When Government suggested that it would support them under the condition that they form a Growers' Association the peasants accepted the idea; for, if Government could aid them in making a living so much the better. The peasants, from the very beginning, were pragmatic and they were to judge the venture primarily in terms of its ability to protect and further what they considered to be their primary problem, that is, the market position and cash returns on their arrowroot starch.

In the peasants minds, then, the fundamental question was, "Can a better living be made through membership in the Associa-

tion?" Government, in one way or another, assured them that this would be the case, and so they joined the Association. They did not join it because of lofty sentiments concerning co-operation and the like, nor was the Association initially expressed to them in these terms. Being concerned with immediate problems of livelihood the factory and not the amorphous Association, was of key importance to the peasants who joined.

From their point of view the factory had two distinctive advantages ; it provided a ready market for their roots, and saved the arduous task of converting them into starch. But under normal operating conditions the factory could not buy roots at the same price that the peasant could retail his starch. Thus, the overwhelming consensus of peasants today is that they ceased sending their roots to the factory because it was paying what they considered to be insufficient prices on these roots.

A peasant's labour in those days was cheap --- labourers making between one and two shillings a day --- and cash was hard to come by. Despite the agreed upon technological advantages of the factory and the higher quality starch it produced, people were willing to revert to the strenuous manual procedures for starch production in order to sell their own product. They decided to do this because it became apparent that by making their own starch and eliminating various middle-men by retailing it themselves they would make more money. The Director of Agriculture, in the above-quoted report, admitted to this as well, while maintaining that the Association could not afford to pay higher prices for the producers' roots.

Those critical of the peasants behaviour, as was indicated in preceding sections, viewed the Association as a community project --- which the peasants themselves did not --- and constantly harped upon the fact that the Association failed because the peasants did not co-operate. What is meant here by lack of co-operation is simply that significant numbers of arrowroot producers after the second grinding season or so decided not to sell their roots to the factory. In effect, then, the Association did not meet the pragmatic test the peasants had set for it when they joined, and they consequently returned to following the most profitable course they knew. For them, it was never a matter of co-operating or not co-operating with each other. It might be said that they did not co-operate with the Committee of Management which, as I have noted above, was in their eyes composed largely of outsiders representing Government or 'private interests'. Furthermore, many peasants viewed this not only as a government affair, but one out of which outsiders profited⁹ — and an affair to which they subscribed or did not subscribe as they saw fit.

In brief, they said, "The Government has started this thing to help us make money on our arrowroot, but we find we can make more money by relying on our own efforts; therefore this is what we will do." Since the Association was not a true co-operative and had the type of outside involvement detailed in the preceding pages there was no reason, as far as the peasants were concerned, for viewing the factory as anything other than an analogy to a privately-owned sugar factory. They produced a crop and sold this crop to a buyer. However, there was at least one important difference: they were in a position to produce and market the final product. In so doing they helped to destroy what had been an intrinsically weak organization; an organization which probably could not have existed very long because its *raison d'être*, arrowroot, was due to succumb as a result of conditions far beyond the control of the peasants themselves.

NOTES

1. The data upon which this paper is based were gathered from a variety of written sources and from the reflections and comments of persons who participated to various degrees in the Chalky Mount Arrowroot Growers' Association and its affairs. These data were gathered intermittently during the summer of 1960, the year 1961—1962, and the summer of 1965. During the former periods my stay in Barbados was made possible by financial support from Brandeis University and the Research Institute for the Study of Man, and during 1965 from the United States Public Health Service, Grant MH 11434—01.

2. Personal communication Watts' source for this early identification of arrowroot is "These are the names of the sortes of plants which groweth in Barbados, collected and gathered for the King's use, by James Reed, Gardener, 1690." (Sloane MS. 4070, 17).

3. "The proprietor or tenant of an arrowroot patch usually owns a queer little windmill, a toy mill almost, . . . the worn sails sometimes eked out with garments that, being no longer of any avail for 'raising the wind' are utilised for catching it. The owner is of a thrifty mind, and so on one corner of a sail or patch, evidently from a piece of bifurcated apparel, is balanced by a fragment of a circular one on another" (Moxly 1886: 101). A pen and ink sketch of such a windmill can be seen in Hutchinson (1892) facing page 76.

4. All of this section, unless otherwise noted, is based upon a variety of letters, reports, etc., which are collected in File No. 20: Arrowroot. This file is located in the archives of the Department of Science and Agriculture in Bridgetown.

5. The report which, as far as I know, was never published was written in May 1935. It is of considerable interest as it documents, albeit sometimes superficially, a number of details concerning arrowroot production in Barbados.

Seven villages in the Scotland District are mentioned as being the loci of arrowroot production on the island: Chalky Mount, St. Simon's, Hillaby, and Corbin's village (near Lakes) in St. Andrew; Hillswick, St. Elizabeth—Cleaver's Hill, and Joes' River Tenantry in St. Joseph. About 114 producers are listed for these villages (no figures are given for Corbin's village), 45 of them being in Chalky Mount.

However, I suspect that there were more than this amount, though how many more it is difficult to say. Of the 62- $\frac{1}{4}$ acres in arrowroot recorded for these villages, 45 are listed for Chalky Mount. Chalky Mount was clearly the central arrowroot growing district on the island. Also there is a complete consensus among older persons in the village today concerning the former prevalence and wide distribution of arrowroot in the area. In addition, the report adds that in all of the villages, except Chalky Mount, cane was the chief peasant crop, arrowroot being but a secondary cash crop.

Production techniques in all of the villages mentioned in the report were apparently the same as those described in this paper for Chalky Mount. The average yield of starch per 100 pounds of root was about 25 pounds, the estimated cost of producing a pound of starch ranging from four to six cents. The starch sold from between four to twelve cents a pound, the average being about seven cents. In all of the villages the starch was primarily used for clothes and secondarily as a food.

In all of the villages, except Chalky Mount, the report indicates that the sugar cane is another possible crop for the arrowroot growing peasants. In Chalky Mount, however, the report states that no other crop is "apparent" as an alternative to arrowroot because of poor soil conditions, topography and transportation facilities. How wrong this prediction turned out to be is attested to by subsequent agricultural developments in the village (Cf. Handler 1965). The peasants interviewed in the various villages were divided as to the desirability of increasing their acreages in arrowroot, and most preferred to grow cane which is "easier to handle."

6. On July 19, 1937, the Association was incorporated by the passing of the Chalky Mount Arrowroot Growers' Association Act. The Act can be found in Volume 5 of the *Laws of Barbados 1928—1942*.

7. This debate was published in the *Official Gazette*, June 25, 1942, pp. 307—308.

8. This section is almost entirely based upon statements incorporated into the revised rules of the C.M.A.G.A. The rules, with subsequent minor alterations, were formally adopted on September 16, 1936. A copy of these rules can be found in the Department of Agriculture's File No. 20: Arrowroot.

9. Although some peasant informants admitted that the factory was not government owned, they felt nonetheless that whatever profits were made went "to the people in charge," that is, the Committee of Management. And, when the producers requested higher prices on their roots, the Committee of Management refused, not because, they say, the factory could not afford to pay higher prices, but because higher prices would cut into the "profits" taken by the Committee of Management. In the words of one informant "The managers were taking too much money for themselves." There were also, in the village, rumours of cheating and pilfering of both money and starch. These rumours were directed against certain members of the Committee of Management. Of course, in terms of this affair it is important to note that these rumours, true or not, indicate the peasants' perceptions of events and reflect their lack of belief in the sincerity and professed interests of the members of the Committee of Management.

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