

CHAPTER IV
THE SUGAR PLANTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The emphasis in this chapter is placed upon the sugar plantations which surround Chalky Mount. Figuring prominently in the village's ecological system, the plantations are a major source of jobs for the village's population. They also provide about 34 per cent of the village's cane growing land (Chapter III) and close to 47 per cent of its pasture lands (Chapter V).

In this chapter, then, I propose to examine these plantations in terms of their role as job providers, and to discuss the statuses of the workers, the kinds of jobs they perform, and the organization involved in the performance of these jobs. In this sense, I am not looking at the plantation as an "economic institution" (Greaves 1959:14), but rather at those aspects of its social system which are revealed primarily in the statuses, roles, and organization of the workers. Thus, I am viewing the villagers' adaptations to the land within the context of a particular institutional type which influences and directs the nature of the relationships formed by the workers.

Since this chapter is focused upon the plantations for which Chalky Mount villagers work, the sample is a small one composed of four plantations (one of which is actually two plantations managed and operated as a single unit) though 92 per cent of the village's regular laborers work for only two of these (Table 20).

All plantation fields are within relatively short walking distances of the workers' homes. None of the sample plantations has its own factory (each contracts with one or more of the island's factories for the selling of its cane); many of their fields are located on hillsides, some of which are quite steep; the plantations are totally dependent upon rainfall for their water supply; and there is a moderate amount of mechanization (primarily in certain phases of cultivation and the hauling of cane to factories). Their average land area is about 259 acres, but sugar cane is only grown on an average of about 154 acres. Consequently, Chalky Mount laborers are accustomed to working on relatively small plantations whose owners and managers are all Barbadians, mostly colored and Negro. In general, then, the plantations' organization and role complexes are relatively simple. In many of these characteristics the sample plantations contrast rather sharply with the "field-and factory combines" which have been described in, for example, British Guiana (Jayawardena 1963), Puerto Rico (Mintz 1956), and Jamaica (Cumper 1954).

PLANTATION STAFF

The Manager

Although authority rests ultimately in the hands of plantation owners, the person who is largely responsible for the day to day operation of the plantation, and consequently the person with whom the workers have the greatest contact, is the manager. While the dual role of owner-manager is not uncommon in Barbados, no owner in my sample also functions as manager. The manager's role demands that he make virtually all of the operational decisions on production activities in addition to functioning as director of field activities, bookkeeper and paymaster.

Although managers live fairly close to the villages of their laborers, they are oriented in different social directions, and participate very little in the extra-working lives of the workers. While relationships can hardly be described as impersonal, managers, as a rule, do not participate in the adjudication of disputes outside of the working environment, lend money, serve as god-fathers to laborers' children, nor attend their weddings and funerals. Working relations between managers and laborers are fairly harmonious and each side seems to be well aware of what it can expect and demand of the other side. Though workers may not like the manager personally, grievances against him or, for that matter, the plantation system itself, are relatively rare.

The manager is often assisted by the "superintendent" (foreman) in the supervision of certain kinds of field labor. Overseers or sub-managers are absent on the plantations for which most of the Chalky Mount laborers work, though in the hierarchies of larger plantations in Barbados overseers are immediately subordinate to the managers.

The Superintendent

Superintendents come from the laborers' ranks and live within the local villages towards which their lives are oriented. Although superintendents are normally better off than most of the laborers, they are undifferentiated from them in terms of social class, and manifest few perceivable cultural differences. There are two superintendents in Chalky Mount though there are a few retired men who used to perform this role. One occasionally hears the word "driver" applied to this position--a survival from slave days when favored field hands were put in positions of authority over other field hands--but the term superintendent is generally preferred today.

The superintendent receives a regular weekly wage which is guaranteed whether or not there is work on the plantation. For example, although field workers might only work three days a week during the out-of-crop season, the superintendent, who normally has no work when there are no field gangs operating, will be paid his full weekly

wage. Although this salary can easily be exceeded by cane cutters and truck drivers during the crop season (see section on earnings and employment) few laborers can surpass the superintendent's yearly earnings. He is, as well, exempt from manual labor, and receives other benefits commensurate with the manager's dependency upon him. For instance, if a superintendent is sick and cannot report to work he may receive $3/4$ of his salary even though the plantation is under no legal obligation to do this. There are other perquisites which attach to this position. The superintendent may have the use of the plantation tractor, free of charge, to cultivate his sugar cane parcel if he is a small farmer; and it is not unlikely that plantation trucks will haul his cane to the factory as well. Also the superintendent is often allowed a fairly wide latitude in his authority over the laborers, and it is rare for a manager to contradict a superintendent's labor decision, e.g., in an altercation with a laborer the manager will invariably support the superintendent even before the "facts of the case" are known to him.

The superintendent functions primarily in the supervision of labor crews which are paid on a "day work" basis (i.e., a daily rate--see below). Piece, or task workers are usually checked by the manager. However, in jobs paid at day rates the superintendent is normally in constant attendance over labor crews, insuring that work

proceeds according to the manager's standards. Hence, most work demands upon the superintendent are made during "hard times" when proportionately more "day work" is done, although he still nominally supervises some cane cutting crews--who are paid task rates--during the reaping season to insure that "things is done right."

The superintendent, then, functions as a foreman. His authority, though limited, may be increased to the extent to which the manager, in the absence of overseers and other staff, has to depend upon him in everyday plantation work. But his official authority is generally confined to field laborers and not to such other plantation workers as truck and tractor drivers, most of whom are under the direct authority of the manager.

Other Staff Members

Other statuses within the plantation's staff (i.e., those positions which are paid weekly salaries) include house servants, yard men or grooms, and the watchman. The yard man is primarily responsible for the care of the plantation's livestock and the performance of odd jobs around the plantation yard (i.e., the cluster of buildings, including the manager's house, and the space between and around them which forms the administrative and storage locus of the plantation).

The watchman is usually a class A laborer (see below) who performs his duties as a part-time job. He

makes his rounds during the night--a few times a week during hard times and more frequently during crop season when the danger of cane fires is greater. The conscientiousness with which a watchman performs his job can vary, but his main obligation is to see that "nobody carries things away." But, as the incidence of stealing, especially of food from the fields, is much less today than in former times, in actuality the watchman has little to do, and because of the size of the plantation he can accomplish his rounds within a few hours or so.

The status ranking and authority relationships of the positions outlined above and of the laborers are diagrammed in Figure 3. It is to be noted that aside from the manager and owner the only staff member who clearly enjoys higher prestige is the superintendent who, in terms of the ranking system, is on about the same level as the tractor driver. The latter, because he is paid a daily rate, is technically not a staff member, but the daily salary he does receive is the highest of all plantation workers, and the fact that he is considered a highly skilled worker puts him in a position by himself.

The vertical lines in Figure 3 are intended to indicate the ways in which the statuses are linked in terms of usual authority, and the status ranks, though not rigid, approximate the way in which the situation is perceived by the people themselves.

THE WORKERS

Introduction

Most of the plantation's non-staff population can be considered as belonging to one of five work classes. These are formally defined in terms of age, sex, and task performance. Though there is sometimes an overlap between formal class membership and the type of job done, we can nevertheless introduce the field laboring segment of the plantation's labor force--its largest contingent--in terms of Class A, males and females; Class B, males and females; and Class C, children.

These classes are recognized categories which are employed in discussions between the Barbados Workers' Union and the Sugar Producers' Association when, for example, wage rates are negotiated. Under such circumstances all, except those under 18 years of age, belong to either Class A or B. Class A males are defined as those who perform at least two of the following jobs: cutting canes, digging cane holes, or digging drainage ditches, while all other males who do not meet these criteria are considered as Class B. Class A females are defined as those who, during crop, head and/or load canes, and during hard times carry baskets of dung. Class B women perform jobs outside the range of A tasks. Class C includes both boys and girls

under 18 years, although the law prescribes that they should not be less than twelve years old.

One often hears the three major field groups referred to as the first, second, and third gang--terms which survive from the days of slavery when field slaves were thus divided, each gang having particular task responsibilities (or more properly a complex of task responsibilities) which in many respects are comparable to the tasks performed by the classes of today.¹

Each class carries a corresponding wage on day work which ranges from Class A male at the top and decreases through Class B male, Class A female, and Class B female with Class C members receiving the least (Table 23).

¹For example: "Of the 276 Negroes at Codrington in February, 1781, some 162 were organized into three field gangs. Drummer and Johnny Sharry, the black drivers, led the first or great gang of 35 men and 49 women in their tasks of holing the ground for canes, planting, cutting, and carrying the canes to the mills. Quawcoe Adjoe, a boy, and two women, Sue and Sarah Bob, directed 10 boys and 13 girls in the lighter duties of the second gang, such as planting corn, carrying dry trash to the boiling house for fuel, turning manure and weeding the cane fields. Old Dinah drove the little "meat pickers"--23 boys and 26 girls--of the third, ...gang to their work of shovelling manure into cane holes before the cane was planted, helping to weed young canes, and gathering fodder, called hogsmeat, for the livestock..."

"A few declining men and women were members of the second gang." (Bennett 1958:11,15). See also Pitman (1926: 599-602).

Class A Males

Class A males, who comprise 30 per cent of Chalky Mount's regular plantation workers, are among the younger men, their average age being about 40. Primarily working as cane cutters and truck crew members during the crop season, and as cane hole diggers during the out-of-crop season, Class A males average the highest earnings among the field groups (Tables 21,22). Since most jobs they perform are paid for on a task basis, differences in work output are largely manifest in earnings even though mechanized equipment used in cultivation has made their services unnecessary for extended periods during the out-of-crop season.

The First Row Man.-One Class A man is known as the "first row man." Although not a staff member, he assumes this status as a management appointee, and is usually considered as a faster and more responsible worker. The first row man may be viewed as a sub-foreman, and he works with the groups of Class A males who do such task-paid jobs as digging cane holes. He does the same kind of work they do and is paid at the same rates, but he is responsible for noting the amount of work each man does and reporting this to the manager at the end of the day. His privileges are limited--although he does receive some extra money for his duties--as is his authority, and because of the indeterminate and poorly defined nature of

his authority there are more apt to be conflicts between the first row man and other laborers than between the latter and the superintendent. He can report recalcitrant laborers, but he cannot make labor decisions, and he is considered to be far more expendable than the superintendent. However, in the event that the superintendent cannot work, the first row man will usually substitute for him. Superintendents were usually first row men themselves, and the position can be viewed as an apprentice stage to the job of superintendent.

Class B Males

Class B men are employed in fewer numbers and receive proportionately less work than any other adult labor class. Much of the work they could perform, e.g., weeding the fields, cutting potato slips, etc., is more commonly performed by Class A women who receive less daily pay, and who perform these jobs just as effectively and probably faster as well. This is a major reason for the infrequent use of Class B men. About 8 per cent of Chalky Mount's plantation laborers are class B men. Their average age is 61, none being under 50. They are largely employed in the clearing and weeding of drainage ditches and other assorted and minor jobs.

Class A and B Females

Females find, on the average, more employment during the year than either of the male groups (Tables 21 and 22). Reasons for this lie not only in the fact that mechanized equipment has diminished the need for male labor during the out-of-crop, but the kinds of jobs that females perform, such as weeding and distributing fertilizer, are in fairly continuous demand. Also, since plantations in the Scotland District normally employ two female headers per cutter during the crop, and most out-of-crop chores can be effectively performed by females who receive less pay on a daily basis, one can see why females, as a group, are regularly employed in larger numbers and work more days, over the year, than men.

During the crop, Class A females comprise most of the headers--though, on occasion, younger men are used as well--and during hard times their major chores are the weeding of the fields to be cut in the following crop, and the distribution of animal and chemical fertilizers.

In terms of actual plantation operation, the classification of workers being followed here is least applicable to Class B females. By the definitions offered above, these include women who do not head during the crop nor carry dung baskets during hard times. Yet, there is a group of female workers known as "farmers" who, though tech-

nically Class B workers, are nevertheless paid at Class A female rates for the jobs they perform.

Farmers.-In Barbados, the system of "farming," i.e., the practice of jobbing out fields to be weeded by particular persons, dates to the early 1840's (Starkey 1939:120). Farmers are actually specialized weeders who are kept occupied, regardless of season, hoe weeding fields of newly planted cane. Farmers are paid on a task basis, by the holes weeded, and fields are assigned to them as individuals. Hence, their work, unlike most other major plantation work, is not performed in a crew or group environment. If, for some reason, farmers are called upon to do day work they are usually paid the same rates as Class A females. Farmers find relatively full employment throughout the year, the average amount of days they work comparing favorably with that of workers of other classes (see Table 21).

Farmers and other Class B women (who might be engaged more sporadically in such chores as picking cattle fodder, carrying drinking water to field laborers) are the older women, their average age being about 61 years while the average age of Class A women is 37. Persons in both these female classes comprise close to 57 per cent of Chalky Mount's plantation laborers, Class A females alone accounting for 41 per cent.

Class C: The Children

Whereas membership in the A and B Classes is determined largely by age, sex, and task, membership in Class C is determined primarily by age. Class C laborers, the third gang, or simply "the children," are but occasionally used on some plantations, and only one of the Chalky Mount plantations regularly employed child labor during 1961-1962. Even this group of about ten children was not employed throughout the year.

Children usually work as a group, and are normally employed in hand weeding and in the distribution of fertilizers. Each child is usually paid on a day work basis, and these wages are considerably lower than the wages of any adult class.

Female Superintendent.-When the children's group is operative, it is under the supervision of a Class A woman who is, for the time being, a quasi-superintendent. There is no special term to designate this status. Under normal circumstances she is engaged in the usual Class A female work of the particular season (under the direction of the superintendent), but if the "children" are working she is called upon to supervise their labors and is paid at her normal Class A daily wage. One can often observe Class A female groups and the children's group working side by side in distributing fertilizers over a given field, and in such cases the superintendent is in charge of the adult

females while the children's group supervisor is nominally in charge of the children. In the absence of the manager, however, the superintendent will still have ultimate authority.

With this introduction to some aspects of the organization of the plantations which employ most of Chalky Mount's laborers, we can now consider some general features of working patterns before proceeding to a more detailed discussion of the tasks themselves in light of the plantations' organization and the agricultural year.

LABOR AND WORK PATTERNS: AN OVERVIEW

Plantations usually have a regular labor contingent which is augmented during the reaping season. There is no large-scale migration of workers from other parts of the island, and most of the added laboring force comes from the village or other villages surrounding the plantations' fields. Although some laborers work for one plantation during hard times, and for a different one during crop--or work for one plantation one year and a different one the next year--the majority of regular plantation employees continue their employment, barring severe altercations with managers, on one plantation and are not inclined to change. In fact, the choice of employer, given the similarity of wage rates throughout the area, is generally based upon the proximity of the plantation's fields to the workers' residence.

Although most major plantation jobs are performed by groups ("farming" being an exception), for the most part, tasks are assigned to individuals. Important exceptions, which will be dealt with more extensively below, occur during crop. In general, though a worker may be part of a labor group engaged in the performance of one job, he is paid not on the basis of the group's performance but on the basis of his own, regardless of whether the work is paid for on a day or task basis. That is, each individual works at his own speed and is paid solely on the basis of his own accomplishment even if this work is carried out within the context of a large labor crew.

Today, most jobs are performed on a task work basis. Laborers overwhelmingly prefer this manner of payment, for they can often make as much or more money by "breakfast time" (early afternoon) doing task work as they could make in the whole day working at day rates. It is also usually admitted and clearly observable that day work performance is slower, and does not necessarily produce a higher quality of work. In fact, the speed and earnestness with which task work is performed varies, in an often remarkable way, from the performance observed on day work jobs. This contrast is even more dramatic when one has the chance to observe the same persons working under the two different pay systems, especially if the day workers happen not to be under managerial supervision. Managers, being well aware

of this, make every effort to place day work crews, regardless of the job they are performing, under as much supervision as possible. In contrast, task work is supervised to a lesser extent, and primarily to insure that the work is conducted according to the manager's standards.

There are some other general differences, regardless of the particular job involved, between task and day work. Day workers, who normally work from 7:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., take off an hour for lunch around noon while task workers normally quit for the day in the early afternoon, and then go home for their mid-day meal. In some cases, task workers could work longer hours if they wished--provided that work remains to be done on the assigned job and the manager did not limit the amount of work that could be done in that day. Managers sometimes do this not only to insure a higher quality job, but also to extend, during hard times, the days of employment during a given work week. Usually, however, task workers prefer to quit after they have done what they feel to be a "fair day's work," i.e., made a satisfactory wage for the day. They leave the job early in the day not only because of the rapid pace at which work has been conducted and concomitant fatigue (a reason managers will sometimes give) but also because finishing earlier frees one to work, for the remainder of the day, on one's own parcel of land or in the performance of other assorted cash and non-cash oriented

chores. Hence, during hard times it is not unusual to see male workers returning home from the fields around 1:30 in the afternoon, and soon after taking their hoes and forks to their own parcels to "work on de ground" for the remainder of the afternoon. In crop season, however, they will not do this. They will take a short lunch break in the plantation fields and continue cutting until five o'clock at a pace which is just as physically demanding as that of any task work they perform during hard times.

This pattern is somewhat different for the farmers who, since they are assigned fields, can go to work when they want, work at moderate speeds, and usually have much more flexibility in their work arrangements.

We can now try to fit the various classes of laborers into the scheme of the agricultural year and consider, in more detail, the tasks performed in light of the above remarks concerning plantation organization and general work patterns.

TASKS AND THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE

Introduction

The intent in this section is to outline and briefly summarize the major tasks which are performed by laborers' work classes and to correlate these tasks and the organization involved in their performance with the two major phases in the agricultural year. It is to be noted

that the same persons usually perform a number of different tasks as these tasks are sequentially taken up throughout the agricultural year. In other words, aside from the customary task assignment along sexual lines, few workers are considered so specialized that they cannot perform a variety of jobs. However, there are individual differences in abilities, and managers attempt to allocate the more specialized jobs in terms of these differences.

Table 23 lists the work classes by tasks and basis of payment (i.e., task or day rates) and these are correlated with the 1961 and 1962 wage rates and season in which particular tasks are performed. Since wages will be taken up more intensively in another section, most of the present section will be devoted, as I said, to a discussion of major plantation tasks and the organization involved in their performance.

Crop Time

Introduction.-During the months from February to May, when the sugar cane is reaped, the majority of the laborers are occupied with cutting and heading the sugar cane and transporting it to factories. It is, then, to the cutters, headers, and truck workers that we now turn, focusing upon the particular characteristics of these roles as they are enacted within the plantation environment.

Cane Cutting.-The procedure followed in cutting cane was described in Chapter III and the operations are essentially the same on the plantations. Wielding their "bills," cutters move through a field, each one taking two or three rows, while the headers move behind them tying the cane stalks into bundles and then heading these bundles to the closest road from whence they are loaded onto trucks and transported to the factories to be sold.

It is the manager's decision as to how the cutting will proceed, who will cut where, and the order in which various fields will be cut. Both workers and managers evaluate fields in terms of whether they are "light" or "heavy," that is, an estimation of the weight of the canes (not necessarily their sucrose content). Cutters prefer working in "heavy" fields from which, for the same physical expenditure, they can make more money because of the higher tonnage these fields yield. For this reason managers are less apt to favor certain cutters by letting them cut in heavy fields only, and large cutting crews are put to work in the "light" fields in order to have them cut rapidly. After these "light" fields have been cut, the cutter force is then distributed equitably over the "heavy" fields.

Although, ideally, cutters can cut as much cane as they want to, and all are paid task rates, there are limits set upon the amount of cane a plantation will cut during

the day. These limits usually result from the daily quotas that factories set upon the plantations which have agreed to send them their cane. That is, in order to insure their operation at maximum efficiency, factories set up daily quotas, and if a plantation's total daily quota has been met cutters then cease their activities for the remainder of the working day. Cutting activities may also cease during the day, especially during the initial phases of the crop season, when there are mechanical failures at the factories. When these occur, factories stop receiving cane if they already have what is considered to be a sufficient amount waiting to be ground. The plantations then stop their cutting activities in order to avoid having excessive amounts drying at the roadsides or in the fields. Cutters are then freed, as they are at the end of the week, to work on their own cane lands or the lands of other small farmers (see Chapter III). Occurrences of this kind must be taken into account when talking of the extent and availability of employment during the crop season.

Cutter's Gangs.--Most Chalky Mount workers who cut plantation cane during 1961 and 1962 cut "alone" and not as members of cutting "gangs". Although cutters usually work in groups of sometimes up to 15 or more men-- on the larger plantations-- these groups may contain cutters who are paid in terms of their individual output, i.e., they cut "alone," as well as cutters who are members of a

"gang." By simply looking at a cutter group in a field one cannot tell which men are cutting "alone" and which are cutting as gang members. All one sees is a line of men strung out along the cane rows.

"Gang" refers specifically to a formally organized group whose members pool their labor resources in a cooperative effort with payment being based upon the group's collective tonnage; total wages for the week are then divided equally among the gang's members. Of the 27 cutters who cut plantation cane for most or all of the 1962 crop² only seven were members of gangs for most or all of the season. The rest, for the most part, worked "alone." However, it is important to note that of the 27, 17 started out as gang members at the beginning of the crop season, but dropped out in a week or so. In fact, at the beginning of the 1962 crop, in the plantation sample, there were between 10 and 15 gangs (which included men from other villages as well), but only three or four of these gangs persisted throughout the season. The gangs rarely contained more than three men, and, for the most part consisted of only a pair of cutters.

²There were more Chalky Mount men than these who cut plantation cane, but they worked sporadically and spent most of their time during the crop cutting peasant cane. They were normally the slowest cutters and older men who made more money when paid at day rates (See Chapter III). When they did cut plantation cane, however, they cut alone and not as gang members.

The cane cutting gang is a voluntary association, and membership is left to the choice of the cutters--that is, a manager will generally not interfere with its composition. Two primary considerations of association are employed by laborers who wish to cut in a gang. These are equal work capacity and personal compatibility--with the former being a necessary precondition to association, and the latter being a necessary condition for the gang's survival. Regardless of personal compatibility, fast cutters will not work with slow cutters for reasons that will become apparent below. Some workers insist upon cutting "alone," and although slow cutters might be willing to cut as gang members they may not be able to find anyone who is willing to join with them. Yet faster cutters worked either singly or as members of a gang.

Because the gang is voluntarily formed, it can easily be dissolved, and the fragility of the unit is attested by the mortality rate of the 1962 gangs. Technical skill and personal compatibility are essential to a gang's perseverance. Hence, if one member rests too often, quits after a few hours of work, does not keep pace with the others, etc., the effectiveness of the group is lessened and antagonism amongst its members can easily erupt. Personal compatibility and previous strong friendship among the members minimize instances of this kind, but in gangs which have been formed solely on the basis of equal work

capacity undue stress within the group, which is not offset by concessions to friendship, can result in the dissolution of the gang. Because gang members are capable of fairly equal performance, it is unlikely that a man who rests too often, for instance, will be able to catch up and cut as much cane as his peers. Yet he will share equally in the proceeds with others who have worked harder.

Gang members usually start work at the same time, take time off for lunch together,³ stop for cigarette breaks together, and so on. Unless gang members are extremely good friends it is unusual to find one member continuing to cut cane while the others are resting, and quite often the gang will not work if, for some reason, one of its members is not present for the day. The difficulty in finding persons who are willing (or able) to adjust to the inherent difficulties in cooperative ventures of this kind, leads to a situation in which conflict is apt to occur--conflict which usually results in the break-up of the gang.

³During hard times people go home for lunch (either during the noon hours if they are doing day work or after they have finished if doing task work). During the crop season a brief lunch period is taken in the fields by both cutters and headers. The noon meal is usually brought to the fields by wives or children. Coincidentally, school attendance, especially for older children, drops sharply during the crop. They are needed around the house not only to mind the younger children (since the adults are off in the fields) and to do other household chores, but also to prepare and bring out the noon meal.

Men who form a gang justify their behavior in terms of their feeling that they can cut more cane as members of a group than they could cut as individuals. Some of the fastest cutters worked in gangs, and although they felt that gang membership increased their output, I have no conclusive evidence to suggest that their work output would have been either greater or less had they cut as individuals.

One immediate advantage of the gang is that it can produce a truck load of cane more rapidly than a cutter working alone; but an exceptionally fast cutter might be able to produce a truck load by the end of a working day, and at the end of the week his earnings will be comparable to those of fast cutters who worked in gangs. It might be to the slow cutter's advantage to cut in a gang with other slow cutters, for working alone it would take about two days for him to produce one truck load, and during this time the canes are drying and decreasing in weight; but these comments must remain hypothetical. In sum, there does not seem to be any distinct, long-run economic advantage to gang cutting, and the comparative infrequency with which it occurs in Chalky Mount would seem to support this view.

Headers.-On Scotland District plantations a pair of headers normally works behind each cutter. As I pointed out in Chapter III, this pattern results from the

topography of the area which, quite frequently, prevents trucks from coming onto the fields to be loaded. There is no mechanized loading in Barbados, thus in many parts of the Scotland District the cane must be carried out of the fields to the closest accessible road. Headers perform this important activity.

Hence, the most normal cane cutting unit consists of three persons: the cutter and his two headers. The alignment of headers with cutters is made by the workers themselves, and consequently faster cutters and headers will make an effort to associate with one another. If the cutter works as part of a gang his association with headers is still based upon the decision of the three individuals concerned. Managers will sometimes influence the composition of the cutting unit especially when cutters and headers are added to the labor force during the course of the crop season. But, even then, the choice of association is commonly left to the workers themselves.

Because the choice of work group is a voluntary one, headers can change their membership provided, of course, that work is available with some other unit. Since headers work as a cooperative unit, it is essential that each person puts in an equal amount of work for, once again, payment is determined on the basis of the unit's tonnage. As a result of unequal work there may be arguments between headers especially among those who are not part of the

normal working contingent of the plantation. That is, regular plantation workers may often include the factor of friendship in their association while others, who join later, have less of a chance to do so, and have to work with whatever unit has an opening. For instance, among those younger women who only work during the crop there is apt to be more joking, flirtation and the like; and older women who may be working with them, and who might object to the lack of work being done, will sometimes try to move to another crew on the same plantation; or, if work is not available on that plantation, move to another one where the working conditions "is more serious."

Heading, as was pointed out in Chapter III, can be quite arduous especially as the distance of the cut cane from the road increases; and the amount of physical energy expended in situations of this kind is compounded on the steeper fields. Hence, on some plantations, headers get paid by different rates according to the distance of the cut cane from the road; but managers on the Chalky Mount plantations, in order to avoid what they feel would involve excessive bookkeeping problems, pay a flat rate. This, they say, compensates in the long run for the differential work demanded; yet, it is difficult to say whether in fact this method works to the header's advantage.

At any rate, headers are paid task rates, and their payment is based upon the total tonnage that is

recorded when their group's truck load goes to the factory. Headers and cutter, then, form an integrated working unit whose earning capacity is not only dependent upon the ability of the cutter but also upon the speed with which the headers can move his cane out of the field to a road.

Truck Drivers and Truck Crews.-Transporting the cane to a factory is the third major task performed during the crop season. Since all transportation is by trucks, the truck drivers and the truck crews have major roles to play in the production cycle.

Truck drivers have one of the most prestigious positions in the plantation's labor force. Not only are they free from agricultural labor, but they also enjoy relative freedom from constant supervision, and their earnings exceed those of most other workers, especially during the crop season (see Table 24). For this money they also put in longer hours than most workers often spending the night in the cab of their trucks at the factory gates so as to be in a favorable position when the scales open in the morning.

During the crop season, plantations, especially the larger ones, augment their truck contingent by pressing more trucks into service. These trucks are generally ones that have remained idle during most of the year or are used by plantation owners in other business enterprises during the out-of-crop.

All members of the truck crews are males mostly in their twenties and early thirties, and many of them do not normally work on the plantations during the out-of-crop season. A truck crew is usually composed of five men plus the driver who is the formal leader. He is responsible for the operation of the truck and is held accountable by the manager if anything should go wrong. Although he does not have the power to hire and fire crew members, he has a great deal of influence in choosing them, and his choice, under normal circumstances, will not be interfered with by the manager. Provided, of course, that crew members are satisfactory workers, the only cases in which a manager might override a driver's choice is when a regular plantation worker will desire a truck job, but cannot find one because the crews are already full.

Because of the nature of the work involved, it is vital that the truck crew operate as a well coordinated unit, and, once again, physical qualifications and personal compatibility are of importance. All who work on the trucks, drivers included, are paid according to the tonnage carried to the factory. Hence, when a truck returns from a factory, it is quickly reloaded for a return trip. Men work rapidly in lifting the cane bundles from the road into the truck. If each member of the crew is not up to performing his share of the labor, arguments may easily develop which sometimes inhibit the rate of work. I have

seen arguments develop among crew members who were chosen at random when a new truck was quickly pressed into service, and younger men are often reluctant to work with older men who, they feel, cannot meet the physical demands of the work.

In all, since the payment that the driver and crew receives (all things being equal, e.g., cutters are working and cane is waiting to be shipped), is dependent upon their functioning in mutual harmony and at maximum speed people associate themselves, as best they can, on the basis of work capacity and personal compatibility. Often times, however, circumstances will not permit these ideal conditions to materialize, and it is interesting to note that although crew memberships shift throughout the reaping season those crews and drivers which remained together for the entire duration of the 1962 crop were precisely those in which circumstances permitted the greatest latitude in the exercise of free choice in association.

In order to make these statements somewhat clearer we might briefly review the work procedure involved in the loading and transportation of cane.

When a truck returns empty from the factory, the driver rapidly seeks out a load at the side of the field where cutters are working. Three of the five crew members proceed to pick up the cane bundles which the headers have dropped--heaving them onto the truck. While these three

load the other two remain on the truck's platform, and as the cane bundles are thrown in, the trash binding the bundles is cut and ejected, and the cane is trampled and distributed in such a way so that it can be picked up by the factory cranes. While the truck is being loaded, work proceeds rapidly and methodically with little joking and talking. Within thirty minutes or so, loading is completed, and the truck is ready to proceed to the factory.⁴

For most factories to which Chalky Mount plantations send their cane the trip, with a fully loaded truck, can vary from 10 minutes to about 35 minutes. However, a truck, upon arrival, can rarely be processed immediately. Under the best of circumstances it takes about 15 minutes at a factory, from arrival to being emptied, but usually it takes longer. Sometimes there are waits of two hours or more, especially during the early days of crop when there are more apt to be mechanical failures at the factories.

Truck drivers feel they have put in a good day's work if they can manage at least 5 full loads a day, but

⁴Most of the cane trash is supposed to be stripped off before a truck arrives at a factory. But since people are paid by the task a conscientious stripping off of trash would only increase their work without increasing their pay. Hence, trucks, even after the trash is picked, are still laden with it, and the factories arbitrarily deduct one per cent of each load for trash.

sometimes this can be increased, and under exceptional circumstances one driver reported that he had once managed 9 loads.

Since truck crews and drivers are paid by the cane tonnage they haul, it is generally to their advantage, other things being equal (e.g., no factory breakdowns) to haul this cane to the closest factories to which the plantation's cane has been committed. Therefore, the situation is quite comparable to the "poor man's lorries" described in Chapter III. Furthermore, since truck drivers make every effort to make as many round trips as possible they can often, if let alone, exceed the plantation's quotas to closer factories while short hauling to others. Hence, as cutting proceeds during the day, the manager will be forced to increase his supervision of truck movements. This issue is the basis of the only regular altercations I witnessed between truck drivers and managers. If, as sometimes happens, all of a plantation's cane is committed to one factory this problem does not arise.

Although there are some other jobs being performed during the crop, e.g., women farming fields, older men clearing drainage ditches, children picking cane trash for animal fodder, most of the plantation's labor force is focused upon the performance of three basic tasks: the cutting, heading and transporting of the cane. Each group within which these tasks are performed is economically de-

pendent upon the other though socially autonomous. But within each group (i.e., the cane cutting group of cutter and headers and the trucking group of driver and crew) the interdependency of the members is so great that the group can be extremely fragile unless its members have similar work capacity and are personally compatible with each other.

Out-Of-Crop

Introduction.-After the last canes have been cut, plantation work all but ceases for the following two weeks except for minor jobs like cleaning the roads of trash. This is the beginning of "hard times", which today spans the period from June to January. The work demands placed upon the labor force are of a different kind; the force loses part of the contingent which augmented it during crop, and work settles down, integrating itself with the demands of sugar cane growing and in preparation for the next crop season.

After the harvest, the fields are mulched by crews of women who spread trash around the cane holes. As the rains commence, cane that was planted in the previous year is given sulfate of ammonia, and potash is distributed on the ratoons. Bulldozers or tractors begin plowing up those fields which will be planted in new cane and the fields which are to remain fallow (i.e. "thrown out") from cane in the forthcoming year. Cane holes are then dug in

these fields, and throughout June and July crews are kept fairly busy planting food crops such as yams, sweet potatoes, corn, etc., which are planted in alternate rows between cane holes in some fields. The practice of planting cane in holes dates to the earliest days of the Barbadian sugar industry, and today cane hole digging is the chief task performed by Class A male workers during the out-of-crop season.

Male tasks.-Before cane holes are put in, the field is laid out into five foot square grids. This job is performed by a man who is considered a specialist in "lining." After the field is "lined," each cane hole digger takes a different row in the field, and digs the holes in two foot squares leaving three feet of "bank" between each one.

Cane hole digging is task work. Each worker is paid solely upon the basis of the number of holes dug, and each man proceeds at his own pace. At the end of the day his work output is recorded by the first row man who then gives this information to the manager. Because the amount of holes contained in each field is already known to the manager (result of the "lining"--see note 6, Chapter III) this serves as a check upon the first row man's figures. Labor crews are under minimal supervision because this is task work.

Cane hole diggers normally start work at about eight in the morning and work steadily until one or two in the afternoon when they quit for the day. As mentioned, they usually do what they consider to be a "fair day's work,"--between 200-300 holes--and though the field might not be completed, they leave it for the day.

By September or October all fields to be planted in cane and/or food crops have been "holed." During November and December the "plant canes," to be reaped in the year-after-next crop, are planted. Class A men especially proficient at this are taken from other work and cut the cane plants from those fields that were planted the year before. Plant cutting is done during a very limited period during the fall and, at best, involves not more than two or three men per plantation. Later, crews plant the cane and in January or so the fields are "supplied," i.e., the stumps which are not coming up are replaced with different ones.

— Though Class A men will also work on trucks, dig drainage ditches, and so on, their major job during the out-of-crop season is digging cane holes. When this is completed, there is little other work for most of them.

Not more than a handful of Class B males find relatively continuous employment, and these are mainly engaged in the weeding of gutters in the ratoon fields and planting of food crops. A few of the younger men, paid at B rates,

are kept busy spraying weeds growing along the roadsides and on other assorted jobs.

Female tasks.-Weeding is a primary female task which continues throughout the agricultural year. During the crop, farmers are weeding the fields of "plant cane," and after the crop they, and other women, commence clearing trash from the newly cut fields, piling it around the holes while weeding. "Weeding and clearing" is usually paid for at task rates, and it is during this process that the fields are mulched. Later, as the cane grows, female crews will once again be put on the fields of growing cane, and farmers will revert to weeding the new "plant cane." Weeding of the fields to be reaped will continue up through December or until the growing cane has so congested the fields that they can no longer be conveniently worked upon. Hoe weeding, then, is primarily a female job, though children's labor crews will sometimes be engaged in the removal of weeds that are most effectively pulled by hand.

The distribution of fertilizer is another primary responsibility of Class A females. Both pen and chemical fertilizer are used although plantations rely less upon pen manure than they did in former times and some plantations

do not use it at all.⁵ Those plantations that do use pen manure ("dung") normally distribute it on the new "plant canes" from about November to January. Although dung is normally distributed by Class A women, the children's group can be involved as well.

Fertilization of the fields is best accomplished by relatively large groups and each laborer is paid at day rates. If there is slacking, the pressure to proceed at a more rapid pace comes not from within the group (as it does in the cane cutting and trucking units) but from the superintendent or, more usually, the manager himself. Because of the pay system, the size of the groups, and the need for rapid and effective fertilizer distribution, the workers are usually kept under constant surveillance and receive active direction from the manager, superintendent, and, if the children's labor crew is working as well, the female superintendent. The degree of direction in terms of verbal commands such as the prodding to take heavier

⁵The plantations which do use pen manure provide their own and acquire it from peasants as well. The process by which pen manure is acquired from small cane farmers is described in Chapter V, and need not be gone into here. Occasionally, one can still see cattle tied in the newly cut fields of some plantations, and, as they feed upon the green cane tops, they also deposit their dung over the area in which they are tethered. By moving the tethering stakes, the whole field can ultimately be fertilized with pen manure. This sight, however, is much rarer today than it was in former times when cattle were extensively used not only for traction but as primary sources of fertilizer.

loads will vary with the personality of the manager and the time limits set upon completion of the task. If, for example, planting has been delayed and new fields are being fertilized in January there is more pressure upon the completion of the job since the crop season will soon be starting.

Another major female task during the out-of-crop season involves the cutting of grass which is used as animal fodder. Not all plantations have "pastures" and those that do keep a relatively small amount of their acreage in it--chiefly in sour grass, which is a "vigorous drought-resistant perennial which grows to a height of two and a half feet" (Starkey 1939:41-42).

Class A women usually cut the grass in 80 foot squares and they are paid task, by the square. Sometimes, managers direct that only one square a day be cut so that, in effect, grass cutting becomes a form of day work. And, since the women are limited in what they can do for the day, they hasten to finish the job. Sometimes they are helped by their children or husbands (who usually have little or no work at this time) and this is the only occasion that I know of wherein household members participate as a group in the performance of plantation wage labor. Although only the female is paid, the manager does not object to her being helped by others.

Summary

By December there is little work to be done. The cane to be reaped in February is high and it is difficult to move through the fields weeding them. Class A men have little to do and, unless odd jobs are found for them, they are generally unemployed. Most fertilizing has already been completed, and in the last two weeks of December work all but ceases (see below--Holiday With Pay). As mentioned, there might be a spurt in work demands during the first few weeks in January mainly to complete the fertilization of fields, but by the end of that month the plantation is ready and the laborers are eagerly looking forward to the crop. The cycle is about to begin anew.

With this discussion of the agricultural cycle and some of the major tasks performed within it, we can now consider the kinds of wages laborers earn and their employment opportunities, and view these within the context of the two major seasons and the work class to which these laborers belong.

EARNINGS AND EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

Prior to World War II, before the days of effective collective bargaining and the growth of the Barbados Workers' Union, wage scales were more arbitrary than they are now. Wages were much lower, and varied from planta-

tion to plantation. Today, this situation has been considerably altered as the negotiating power of the Barbados Workers' Union has increased, and wages on both task and day jobs are more or less standardized--though subject to periodic renegotiations.

Over the past decade plantation workers have received steady wage increases as a result of conditions stipulated in the Domestic Sugar Agreement. This agreement embodies the results of discussions between the Workers' Union and the Sugar Producers' Association on wages and general employment conditions. Among other things, the Domestic Sugar Agreement provides for a production bonus on wages earned during the crop season (see below), and an increase in basic wages, commensurate with the increase in the wage index of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement (see Chapter II), for plantation laborers and those engaged in allied industries. For instance, plantation laborers received, in 1956, a 4.3 per cent increase on their 1954 wages; in 1957 there was an increase of about 14 per cent on 1956 wages; in 1959 an increase of 6 per cent on 1957 wages; in 1960 there was a further rise of about 10 per cent over the previous year's earnings, and once again, in 1962, there was a wage increase of 10 per cent on task work rates and a 20 per cent increase on day work rates. In 1961, daily wage rates were \$3.00 for Class A males, \$2.72 for Class B males, \$2.08 for Class A females, and \$1.92 for Class B females. Task rates for

jobs that these groups perform during the year are indicated in Table 23 and need not be dwelt upon here.

Aside from wage increases, two additional benefits have helped to boost plantation workers' earnings. These are the production bonus and the Holiday with Pay. Since these two payments are so important to plantation laborers' earnings I shall indicate briefly what they involve.

Holiday With Pay

The Holidays With Pay Act is a national law, having been enacted in 1951. It is one of the features of the liberal social legislation which has been passed over the years as popularly supported political parties have increased their control in the island's legislative assembly.

The Act provides for a two week paid vacation for those plantation workers who completed 150 days of work with the same employer during a twelve month period. The amount of money received by each worker is roughly four per cent of his previous earnings--excluding the production bonus (Barbados Annual Report 1956 and 1957:16). Although an employer can determine the date at which the holiday begins, plantations usually pay out money for the final two weeks in December. At this time, as I said, there are few work demands, and if work remains to be done, e.g., fertilization of fields, it can be accomplished during January before the harvest begins.

On Chalky Mount plantations virtually every worker, whether he worked less than the amount prescribed by law or whether he worked for other plantations during the year, received his holiday with pay (Tables 21 and 22). Although a number of workers were not legally eligible, the plantations, trying to encourage workers--especially the more skilled and reliable ones--to remain with them so as to insure their labor supply, offered the money anyway. And this reflects a situation wherein the supply of workers does not seem adequately to fit the demand--contrary to common suppositions about plantation employment conditions in Barbados. We will have more to say about this below. At any rate, the receipt of the Holiday with Pay before Christmas, and at a time when weekly wages are at their absolute minimum--fewer people are working and those who are employed receive, on the average, about 2 or 3 days of work per week--provides a bit of badly needed cash to a number of households. At this time, Friendly Societies (Chapter II) are also paying their "bonus"; "preference money" is paid to peasants by the sugar factories (Chapter III), and these sources of cash added to the Holiday with Pay increase the buying power of many of the laboring class during the Christmas season. One can easily notice the effects of this in the village as people begin to purchase small gifts for children, houses are fixed up, and other consumption needs are met.

Production Bonus

The sugar production bonus is incorporated into the Domestic Sugar Agreement of 1951, and is subject to periodic renegotiation between the Barbados Workers' Union and the Sugar Producers' Association--neither of which are governmental agencies. The production bonus is not written into law as is the Holiday with Pay, but is, in effect, an agreement between two private parties who represent two different interests. The bonus is based on the

Total earnings by all such plantation workers employed from the beginning of the week in which the crop normally commences on such plantations during the calendar year...until the end of the week in which the crop on such plantations ends (and) shall be paid to all such plantation workers in the Sugar Industry...on or before the 30th of September...in respect of their employment...on all crops which are in excess of the negotiated price quota of 131,906 long tons...(Barbados Workers' Union and Barbados Sugar Producers' Association, 1962 crop wage rate agreement, parentheses mine).

That is, the production bonus is based upon the amount of money earned during the crop in relation to the island's total sugar production. Workers receive a 2-1/2 per cent bonus on their crop earnings when island production reaches 131,906 tons of sugar. For each 5,000 tons in excess of this amount an additional 1-1/2 per cent is added. The importance of the production bonus to a plantation worker's total earnings may be seen by referring to Table 21. In 1961, for instance, the bonus was 10 per cent of the worker's crop wages, averaging close to \$27 for all

workers and \$40 for Class A males.⁶

It is important to note that none of Chalky Mount's laborers belong to the Barbados Workers' Union (see below), and the owners of the plantations for which most of these laborers work do not belong to the Sugar Producers' Association. Yet, the latter comply with the terms of the production bonus agreement and the former benefit by them. Also, even those workers who started the crop on one plantation but finished on another received a production bonus from each of the plantations for which they worked. All Chalky Mount male laborers (except Class B men and three Class A men who were out of the country during the 1961 crop) received a production bonus. All females (farmers included--though, of course, they were not engaged in reaping the crop) also received a production bonus regardless of the plantation and amount of days they worked for it.

In general, owners and managers are clearly ready to offer additional inducements to workers to continue working for their plantations, and they do this by not adhering rigorously to the conditions of either the Holiday with Pay Act or the production bonus agreement--interpreting both in what would seem to be a fairly liberal

⁶For the years 1951 to 1960, inclusive, the production bonus was 19,13,11.5,15.47,12.84,7,24.27,8.38,17.5, and 8.5 per cent of crop time earnings.

manner. The liberal interpretation of these additional payments is probably calculated to encourage a dependable supply of labor. It should be pointed out also that most laborers, not fully understanding the technicalities of the Domestic Sugar Agreement or the Holiday with Pay Act, expect and feel that they are legally entitled to both payments whether they have fulfilled all the conditions or not.

Both the production bonus and the Holiday with Pay are important to a worker's total earnings; yet, they are based upon the worker's capacity to earn money during the year. And this earning capacity is not only contingent upon the amount of days in which employment is available, but also upon the physical ability of the worker, and the type of work done and/or the work class to which the worker belongs. Hence, there are differences in workers' earning capacities which make it difficult to discuss wages meaningfully in blanket terms. In other words, it can be misleading, if not erroneous in many cases, simply to discuss earnings and employment by over-generalizing on plantation laborers as a single occupational category. We can now attempt to bring this problem into clearer focus by reference to the data from Chalky Mount.

Earnings and Days Worked

The 1961 earnings and days worked of the various classes of workers (excluding children) are indicated in

Tables 21 and 22. Table 21 deals with laborers who found regular employment during both seasons, and who worked for 120 days or more. By isolating this group of workers we can arrive at a more realistic appraisal of earning capacities and employment than if all workers were to be grouped together into a single table. Table 22 provides information on workers who worked less than 120 days.⁷

Most of Chalky Mount's plantation workers worked at least 120 days during 1961. Of these fifty laborers (Table 21) thirty were females--of both classes--who worked an average of 172 days during the year. Although Class A females received an average of 176 days of work, both classes together still worked about twenty-two days more than the men. In comparing the working days of Class A males and females, females received about seven days more of work. During the crop, however, Class A males found slightly more employment than females, but the figures upon which this statement is based include truck crew members who normally work a longer week than either

⁷Table 22 supplements Table 21, but its figures are not strictly comparable with Table 21. As well as including a handful of persons who worked for both seasons, Table 22 mostly comprises persons who largely worked during one season, e.g., females in the latter stages of pregnancy, males in the United States on contract farm labor programs, males who supplemented regular plantation contingents during the crop season only. For this reason the total days worked and total earnings should be accepted with caution if one wishes to compare Table 21 with Table 22.

headers or cutters. In all, Chalky Mount females are employed in larger numbers (Tables 21 and 22) than males, and, over the year, receive more employment. It would seem that this results from the fact that tasks females perform have been least affected by mechanization (i.e., mechanized cultivation has reduced Class A male employment on a major out-of-crop task), and jobs such as weeding and fertilizing which could be performed by males--especially Class B males--can just as adequately be performed by females at less cost to the plantations (see Table 23).

Although they worked fewer days over the year, males averaged much higher wages. Excluding the two cases of Class B males (Table 21), Class A males averaged \$744 per annum including the production bonus and Holiday with Pay. Class A and B females earned \$503 and \$346, respectively. The contrast in earnings, however, is most dramatic during the crop when A males averaged about \$156 more than A females. During the out-of-crop the gap between their earnings was about \$60.

McKenzie, in his comprehensive survey of Barbados' sugar industry, states that the "...field workers earn the major part of their yearly earnings out of crop and this proportion does not carry the increase due from the pro-

duction bonus" (1958:27).⁸ Taking the total average of all classes of workers who worked 120 days or more (Table 21) it is evident that about 50 per cent of their total wages were earned during the crop season. Yet, this percentage figure includes both sexes of Class B workers, whose services are less in demand during the crop. However male and female A workers combined averaged about 57 per cent of their total earnings during the crop. Assuming that McKenzie's data do not include workers who only worked sporadically during one season, the Chalky Mount data (even if all classes and sexes are included) although admittedly based on a limited sample, are suggestive of a trend towards greater dependency upon crop earnings--especially for those classes of workers who are actually engaged in the reaping of the crop.

It is nothing new to say that a worker can make proportionately more money during the crop than out-of-crop on a daily or even weekly basis; however, it is of some interest to note that, with the mechanization of cultivating activities--which have reduced the demand for Class A male work during the out-of-crop--the A worker

⁸His figures for 1954 to 1957, inclusive, show that 61, 62, 62 and 55 per cent of earnings, excluding the production bonus, were earned during the out-of-crop season.

will have to depend more upon his crop earnings than he did in former times. And if automatic loaders were to be introduced this could drastically affect an already precarious earning situation not only among Class A males (e.g., truck crews), but Class A female headers as well.

Class A males earned 60 per cent of their total wages during the crop, but only worked 44 per cent of their total days during this period; yet, considering that the crop season comprises, at best, about 30 per cent of the year's work weeks, they find proportionately a higher rate of employment during the crop than in hard times and earn commensurately higher wages. But even then there are differences in earning capacities which depend upon the kind of work one does. Some indication of this is presented in Table 24 which shows the weekly average of 1961 and 1962 earnings for the four major roles performed during the crop season. Truck drivers, who are excluded from Tables 21 and 22, are included here to give an idea of how much greater their earning potential is in comparison to that of other laborers.

The hierarchy of earnings during crop is truck driver, cane cutter, and truck crew member. Headers (some of whom are males as well), make the least. Within the three lower positions, there can be an overlap, so that some slower cutters average about the same as some truck crew members. Faster cutters average more money than the

highest paid truck crew members, and it is largely for this reason that the faster cutters, even if they are comparable in age and physical ability to some truck workers, prefer to cut cane. Also headers may average more than truck crew members especially those headers who work behind faster cutters.

In general, then, Tables 21 and 22 clearly show how wages, earning capacities and work opportunities vary according to the sex and work class of the worker and the season of the year. Wage rates (Table 23), however, are largely the result of the influence of the Barbados Workers' Union upon the island's plantation system.

THE UNION

The Barbados Workers' Union--the primary bargaining agent for the island's workers--has had an active role in bringing about the wage increases and improved working conditions which have characterized the sugar industry over the past ten or fifteen years. Yet, the Union has no members among Chalky Mount's plantation laborers nor among the laborers from other villages who work for the plantations being considered in this paper.

During the 1958 crop when there was widespread labor unrest in Barbados⁹ there was a wildcat strike on one of these plantations which eventually led to forty or fifty workers joining the Union. After a year or so of retaining their membership--albeit with laxity in dues payment--interest waned, and at the time of fieldwork no one even claimed membership. Nevertheless, the collective bargaining power of the Union provides benefits even to those who are not its members for although the owners of the plantations for which most Chalky Mount laborers work do not themselves belong to the Sugar Producers' Association, they tend voluntarily to comply with whatever settlements are reached between the Union and the Association. It has been suggested that their compliance with these agreements results from their need to maintain a consistent and reliable labor supply and that employers do not share the belief that this heavily populated island has an excess of cane laborers.

⁹The Barbados Annual Report, after stating that "...prolonged unofficial stoppages of work in the sugar industry marred the reaping season," goes on to suggest that these stoppages resulted from workers' and/or union complaints about 1958 crop wages. A Board of Enquiry was set up and among its recommendations was that a "...full enquiry should be made into the sugar industry" (1958 and 1959:23). This materialized when A.F. McKenzie, then Agricultural Advisor to the West Indies Federation, made his investigations. The report (McKenzie 1958) which resulted from these investigations has been often quoted in the preceding pages.

LABOR SHORTAGES

At the beginning of the 1962 crop the Barbados Advocate reported that

Barbados is experiencing a shortage of cane cutters.... It is believed that it is caused by the migration of large numbers of Barbadians, and the implementation of the Government's crash programme which has attracted some of the cane cutters (February 8, 1962).¹⁰

An editorial about five weeks later reiterated that cane cutters were not in oversupply (March 12, 1962). But, a few days later the Advocate reported that

...it appears that there is no real shortage of cane cutters in the island but merely the shortage of hours caused by the four-and-a-half day week. Mr. Frank Walcott, general secretary of the Union said yesterday: 'I do not know anything about a shortage of cane cutters. No one reported to me that there was one' (March 16, 1962).¹¹

¹⁰The crash programme refers to a governmental effort to provide emergency jobs for some 1200 men on various public works projects. At the time of the above article approximately 1000 were thus employed.

¹¹During 1962 crop there was a negotiated agreement between the Workers' Union and the Sugar Producers' Association to limit cane cutting to a four and a half day week.

And yet, three days later, the Advocate, under the banner "SHORTAGE OF CANE CUTTERS?" stated the following:

The Barbados Sugar Producers' Federation is trying to find out whether there is at present a shortage of cane cutters in the island's main industry. They are investigating a report from certain sugar factories that production is slowed down because of a shortage of cane cutters in the area. Other factories, however, report that they have an adequate supply of canes during the days of operation despite shortened working hours. As to whether there really is a shortage of cane cutters, or whether the inadequate cane supply to factories is due to the shortage of working hours, an official of the Sugar Producers' Federation said yesterday: 'We are now going into the matter' (March 19, 1962).

In all, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not there was a genuine shortage of plantation labor during the 1962 crop. However, old time managers and officials of the Sugar Producers' Association confess that in recent times it is more difficult to be assured of having enough cane cutters to reap the crop. Among the more common reasons given for this are the recent large scale emigrations to England, and more governmental jobs for unskilled workers. There is also an increasing tendency, as was pointed out in Chapter III, for younger persons to be less willing to engage in certain kinds of plantation work. This does not apply only to young people with secondary school educations, but also to

literate youths with less education.¹² On Chalky Mount physically able young men, for instance, largely disdain such out-of-crop work as cane hole digging. They have similar attitudes towards cane cutting and prefer the less traditional and less monotonous truck work. During the out-of-crop, though plantation employment might be available to them, they will refuse it giving such reasons as their looking for other employment, their waiting to emigrate, or frankly stating that they prefer waiting until the crop when more money can be made in jobs they prefer. In short, it appears that there has been a change in work values which is reflected, as one manager put it, in the unwillingness of many to "work with the hoe."

Although no plantation manager in the Chalky Mount area complained of a labor shortage, they all admitted that they could use more cutters--and in some cases headers as well. It is not uncommon to find that planters in certain locales have to rely upon labor from other plantations during the closing days of the crop. That is, some plantations augment their regular cutters

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That this situation has been going on for several decades is attested to by Starkey's observations in the mid 1930's that "the availability of education has been both an advantage and a disadvantage to the island's economic system...many of the laboring classes have become dissatisfied with field labor and, at times, there has been a shortage of field laborers and a considerable surplus of clerks and artisans" (1939:197).

and headers with "outside" workers (i.e., persons from villages other than the ones from which their regular laborers come) in order to finish reaping their fields before the factories close for the season.¹³

It is difficult to say if the overall situation can be accurately described as a labor shortage; but managers often claim that labor is not in over-abundance intimating that at times, especially during the crop--but occasionally during the out-of-crop as well--they could add more workers to their field and truck crews. It would merit further investigation to ascertain whether this attitude reflects a genuine scarcity of labor at certain times or

¹³At this time "poor man's lorries" (Chapter III) play another role. By the closing days of the crop most peasant cane has already been cut thereby leaving these trucks with more of a need for work. There are usually plantations, however, which have not yet completed cutting their fields as well as other plantations whose fields have been cut. Workers on these latter plantations are left without, or with little, work while those plantations still cutting want additional workers to help finish off their remaining acreage. A driver of a "poor man's lorry" is usually in a good position to know which plantations want workers and which ones have workers to spare. He agrees to supply workers to plantations in want of them on the condition that the cane cut by these workers will be transported in his truck. The driver then puts out a call for workers on those plantations which have ceased their cutting. In the morning he transports these volunteers to the new plantation, which might be quite distant, and is responsible for bringing them back to their village in the evening. During the day he hauls the cane they cut and the laborers are paid by the new plantation. This type of work seldom lasts for more than a week or two, and may involve a day or two on one plantation, a day or two on another and so on.

simply an occasional difficulty in acquiring labor, a difficulty which is exaggerated by assumptions traditional to plantation operations, e.g., that labor be "plentiful and cheap" (Wolf and Mintz 1957:400).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have been concerned with the plantation as a land exploiting unit which plays a major role in the village's economic life. I was thus concerned with the ways in which Chalky Mount's laborers derive wages from the plantations for which they work. Consequently, emphasis was placed upon the plantations' labor force rather than upon other aspects of plantation organization. The discussion centered upon the roles of the workers within the context of the various work classes, the association of tasks during the annual production cycle, and the organization of work activities. Wages and earning capacities were then related to the various roles and the seasonal differences in task performance.

It was seen that the plantations for which most Chalky Mount laborers work are relatively small in terms of their cultivated acreages, labor forces, and their lack of factories. Mechanization is limited to certain aspects of field cultivation and to the transportation of cane. Also the plantations' hierarchical organizations and major role complexes are relatively simple. The

plantations are not owned by large foreign based corporations, but by Negro and colored Barbadians formed into simple partnerships or as individual proprietors. These owners are resident in Belleplaine and recently acquired the plantations. They still retain, in spite of their affluence, many patterns and values which reflect their lower or middle-class origins. Managers are also Negro and colored Barbadians of middle-class status. They depend upon plantation lands to pasture their own livestock and to raise food crops which they sell in the Barbados market. Both livestock and food crops are important sources of income which supplement the relatively modest salaries they earn.

Although there are well-pronounced status differences between owners and managers on the one hand and laborers on the other, there are numerous cultural similarities and all operate in terms of many shared values and an awareness of what each may legitimately expect or demand of the other. Managers know the working habits of each of their laborers and quite often are aware of their personal histories, family ties, and know all of them on a first-name--or usually a nickname--basis. The status differences are real, but there is a proximity of living and common life experiences which affect the organization and the working of the plantations in special ways. Although the plantations are fundamentally profit-seeking enterprises geared to the production of a monocrop for a large-scale external market,

there is nonetheless a personal quality of relationships which enter into their every day operations, and this presents a different atmosphere from the large field-and-factory combines described for other parts of the Caribbean. In a number of respects, then, the plantations for which most Chalky Mount laborers work have some of the characteristics of Wolf's "old style plantation" (1959) or even of the hacienda (Wolf and Mintz 1957).

One does not find, in the Chalky Mount area, a situation wherein there is a great deal of competition for few jobs. Even if this were the case, there are a number of controls in the form of standardized wage rates, a national labor government, an influential union, etc., which would prevent the lowering of the price of labor that one might expect to result from competitive situations of this kind. Chalky Mount plantations do not operate with a large and constant oversupply of labor. Although local villages provide sufficient labor for the maintenance of plantation operations, and there is ordinarily very little dependency upon "outside" laborers, there is some seasonal underemployment. Yet labor is not as expendable as it might appear--especially male labor on the more skilled field jobs--and this, along with various personal elements and shared values in the manager-worker relationship, sometimes affects employment and wage conditions. I spoke before of the extension of the Holiday with Pay and production bonus to workers who otherwise might not be entitled to these

payments, the latitude of choice allowed workers in the formation of cutting gangs and units and transport crews, and the equitable distribution of cutting crews over "light" fields. At some personal inconvenience, managers also make wage payments to tardy workers outside of the normal pay hours, will release workers to go to funerals and might even send presents to favored workers who marry.

Conflicts are infrequent and firings are rare. Two cases of firings were reported during 1961 and 1962, and in both instances these resulted from altercations between workers, and the managers thought it best to remove the "trouble makers." But these workers had no difficulty in finding jobs on other plantations. Today, the loss of job need not pose a "serious problem of biological survival" (Wolf and Mintz 1957:400). Not only is work usually available on other plantations, but workers can often fall back on other sources of income. I do not mean to underestimate the limited alternatives available to workers, but nonetheless there are alternatives. During crop no one need be without work, and although in hard times cash resources are limited, the presence of other cash earning opportunities--albeit limited in number--still make it difficult to consider the problem in terms of biological survival especially when one takes into consideration the total economic resources of households.

In fact, plantation managers, rather than paring their labor crews to a minimal core of workers during the

latter phases of "hard times," generally try to provide work for all or most of their regular workers so that even though people will generally work about two or three days, work is nonetheless available. The sugar production bonus is paid during the early fall, and the Holiday with Pay also injects modest sums of cash into households during the latter phases of the out-of-crop. Similarly, during this time sugar factories are making terminal payments to small cane farmers on the cane that was sent during the previous crop, and this adds cash to the village's households and provides money for small farmers to hire workers on their small holdings. People can revert to other cash producing activities as well.

Regular plantation workers have some notion of their occupational unity and commonality of interests, but within the village this does not promote special bonds of solidarity among them (Cf. Mintz 1956, Jayawardena 1963). In Chalky Mount plantation workers do not form a distinctive subcultural unit nor do they feel that the problems they have, economic or otherwise, are unique to themselves as plantation workers. The consciousness of kind they possess is that of "poor people," and as such they align themselves with most others in the village regardless of occupational pursuits. This sentiment is further promoted by the frequent overlapping of cash-oriented activities which individuals pursue, and the multiple economic activities, or

sources of income, which most households have (see Tables 7 and 8).

Even though only 54 per cent of Chalky Mount's households are represented by regular plantation workers, few of these households are totally dependent upon the plantations as a source of cash. Dependency varies, although for some the plantation forms the single largest source of cash income; but most households have other means of support as well. This still does not minimize the importance of the plantations in the community's total economic life, but the existence of other outlets and the overlap among these in terms of households and individuals seems to work against the emergence of a distinctive way of life for the regular plantation laboring segment. It may be true that the plantations have had an overwhelming influence on the development of the rural lower class sub-culture of Barbados, but this influence cannot be isolated to plantation workers as a single occupational category.

At any rate, plantation wage labor is still a primary source of the village's internal revenue, and over the year the plantations provide the single greatest block of job opportunities for Chalky Mount's wage earners. Sugar farming activities, then, in the form of plantation wage labor and small-scale farming dominate the land-based economic complexes of Chalky Mount, and are crucial components of the village's adaptational system. But, as was pointed out before, they do not constitute the totality of land

adaptations in the village. The other land-based complexes, to which we now turn, include the cultivation of minor cash and subsistence crops, the raising of livestock, and the making of pottery.