

The single most profound tragedy of the Jamaican socio-economic milieu is the effects of political violence on stable communities. Violence has caused homes to be left empty, making them susceptible to looting and scrapping. When the violence subsides, if it ever does, only the building 'shell' remains. Those who were once proud owners have become landless poverty-stricken nomads overnight. These empty decaying structures then become the haven of lumpen criminal elements who terrorize the remaining citizens and frustrate meaningful attempts at community development.

This phenomenon is a creation of the political process exaggerated by the lack of sufficient economic benefits. It is this experience of economic deprivation and neglect that makes the struggle for politico-economic power so intense; the manifestations of which are the wanton destruction of human life and property. In their dreadful efforts to obtain economic betterment through their political representatives, they perceive that in eliminating others they will achieve the lion's share of whatever scarce benefits are available. Hence any attempt at national development has to take into account this explosive problem. International assistance can only be meaningful if it is welded within a domestic politico-economic strategy aimed at confronting this situation.

Moreover, the world economy is beset by the twin evils of double-digit inflation and high unemployment. The western economies to which Jamaica is intrinsically linked are busy embarking on long-term programmes of monetary stringency and protectionism. Developing societies like ours do not possess the type of social programmes or welfare 'buffers' to

alleviate the sufferings inflicted on the working population by the standard monetary remedies of high interest rates, high prices and wage control. The problem is made even more unbearable by the escalating prices of needed imports, mainly oil, to which we are completely vulnerable due to our lack of cheap energy resources, low level of industrialization and a disappointingly underdeveloped agricultural sector.

The task therefore is urgent as it is clear. Foreign exchange from export earnings are required to spur the development of both sectors. Oil facilities, foreign aid, 'soft' loans and even a New International Economic Order still mean the postponement of a solution to the problem if they are not matched with increased production. Accordingly, strategies designed to enhance productivity and optimise scarce resources should be implemented. It is in this direction that the co-operative offers real possibilities.

It is economically attractive in a dynamic sense, in that it rewards and encourages the forces directly involved in production (worker-ownership as against an absentee shareholding Board of Directors). In so doing, it generates an atmosphere of worker security, confidence and optimism, vitally necessary ingredients in the production process.

Our analysis will be concentrated on the urban situation where the mass of the population exists. It reveals an environment made volatile by the presence of a vast army of unemployed unskilled, semi-skilled and scattered underemployed tradesmen. Hence the collective experience is imperative. This inescapable path is to be found in the capacity of the co-operative unit to effectively confront the problems of indiscipline; chronic unemployment; lack of capital; management insufficiency and low productivity.

The urban ghetto dynamic presents an economic phenomenon that demands serious study in that orthodox features of economic theory and practice are overthrown by hybrid structures that have evolved in the process of survival.

This paper will therefore speak to the economics of the poor communities, specifically the interplay and status of the factors of production and the technical approaches that should be used in our efforts to produce goods and services given the problems mentioned.

Chapter I will be devoted to analyzing existing research on the subject matter, while Chapter II will offer a case study of an urban co-operative movement. An analysis will be made of the social and political groupings that foster or inhibit the formation of co-operatives, using a number of communities as examples. The value-orientation of society will be examined with a view to determining the type of co-operative endeavours that should be instituted.

An attempt will be made to construct a model reflecting a change in the political economy of communities, with the co-operative being the essence of that change. This will be done within the context of a reform in local government. Using the data and information presented, a summary will be made to conclude the case for the co-operative as a change-agent in national development.

This paper has been researched over the past five (5) years. It is hoped that its contents will prove worthy of the patience and support of my tutor. Finally, it is my utmost wish that it will serve in some small way to enrich the study of depressed communities and co-operative development, which may ultimately lead to some attempt to grapple with the persistent deprivation of the poor.