

May, 1978

Notes and reflections on our trip to Guyana, particularly our three days at the Peoples' Temple Cooperative Agricultural Project.

"Impressive" was the first word to come to mind when I was asked what I thought of the project. The clearing of more than eight hundred acres from the midst of the jungle, and the planting of crops is impressive. To imagine more than a thousand Americans migrating to Guyana and working in the project is impressive. Every aspect of the work and life there I found impressive.

As we rode into the area of the buildings we saw Annie and Kimo. Carolyn was quickly there. They took us for a *tour* of the area. Senior Citizens were engaged in calisthenics under the direction of a young woman. We walked to the nursery where infants and toddlers were being cared for.

Later in the day, probably early in the evening, we visited the clinic and talked with Larry (M.D.) who is obviously exceptionally bright. He showed slides and pictures of some of their work. He has equipment for cellular studies, tests, and a new portable x-ray. Two X-ray technicians are there. Two or three nurse practitioners, with varying specialties, and five or six R.N.'s (or more) round out the medical staff. Annie, in addition to nursing, is in charge of medical supplies. They provide family planning for members of their own community. Clinic hours on Sundays for residents of the region were posted at the entrance to the Project, however, they treat people whenever they come.

They are in instant communication with a network of physicians through amateur radio operators. Larry has consulted with specialists a number of times, including his delivery of twins by caesarean section. They have been visited by the president of a medical association which provides consultative services by radio, and have his full support.

Two Guyanese dentists have held clinics at the Project. Upon one occasion the dentist found only two cavities among the children. This is probably attributable to diet. I think that there are more than forty pre-schoolers living there, in addition to other children of all ages.

The educational program is accredited by the government department of education. I think that they have had, this year, classes through jr. high, with high school work being offered in the fall. The teachers are enthusiastic, for they are able to do some of the things they've always wanted to do in teaching, but have never been free to do. They make their own educational tools, as well as a variety of play toys. Classes are offered for people of all ages including reading and writing, as well as current events. The p.a. system keeps the people abreast daily of events throughout the world. Both dramatic and educational films are shown every evening. "The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter," and a film on the status of women in the Soviet Union were shown one night we were there.

Our first evening at the project, a Friday, people gathered to listen to the band and enjoy the entertainment. The band has performed in Georgetown and has received good press coverage. They play jazz, soul, rock, etc. A seventy-five year old woman did her "Moms Mabley" routine, and a preacher the same age sang and danced. A twelve year old boy sang a solo. A Guyanan from that region brought his flute, played and sang. It was good entertainment.

Single people live in dormitories while families live in houses. One older woman wanted her own house, so they constructed a tiny house for her. The elderly live close in where they *are* checked daily to ascertain the status of their health. The buildings are simple, with wood siding and sheet-metal roofs. Throughout Trinidad and Guyana the roofs were of sheet-metal. There was running water in the guest house, and I presume in the dorms and houses. Showers and toilet facilities are in separate buildings.

All of the cooking is done in a central kitchen on wood stoves. Imagine serving three meals a day to more than a thousand people! People are free to eat in a small dining area or take their food wherever they choose. All of the buildings, except where people sleep, have open sides. Some of the meeting areas are covered with heavy tenting, still open sided. What is needed is protection from sun and rain with structure for circulation of air to keep cool. There is no need for fuel for heat. We ate well. Most of the food has been grown or produced on the land there. They are not producing enough rice or potatoes for their use. Cassava is a tuber which is used for flour for bread, and I suspect hot-cakes, as well as for feed for the animals.

They grow casava (and use both leaves and tubers) custard apple, citrus, pineapple, coconut, bananas, I think pineapple, edoes, cutlass bean and corn. They are still working on dry farming of rice. (Guyana is a rice exporting nation.) Starting with 12 seeds of the winged bean, which is 38% protein, they hope to plant eight or ten acres this fall. They produce their *own* eggs and frying and stewing chickens, as well as pork. They have some cows, and soon will have modern dairy equipment.

Their first priority is to become self-sufficient. I think that their major cash outlay is for animal feed, fertilizer, and petroleum for generating electricity. Of course they must pay cash for medical equipment and supplies. They have a 60 foot trawler which they use to haul in supplies and equipment to Port Kaituma, and they sometimes take pay loads, as they do with a truck in Georgetown. One of their members travels up and down the river engaging in barter.

They have a nutritionist who is engaged in continuing research. They have found some ways to use plants that *have* been considered un-edible. The Amerindians share their wisdom with the people about food and medicinal herbs. They have their own herb garden, as well as a smoke house. They are excavating for underground cold-cool storage.

They have a machine shop with a tool and die maker teaching younger people to do the work of machinists. They have a mill where they can cut material and erect a house in a day. They are making furniture and toys. They, of course, maintain all of their equipment. They are constructing a windmill which they hope may help with some generating power.

We heard after we returned that the President and Prime Minister of Guyana, and the Prime Minister of Surinam visited the project unannounced. Officials of the U.S. embassy have visited, as well as officials in the departments of health, education and agriculture. (Guyanese) The Guyanese have a vital interest in developing the interior of the country. The people live on the coastal plains. If the Peoples' Temple Agricultural Project can become self-sufficient, it has significant implications for the nation as well as similar countries.

I have never been anyplace where I saw the older people so much a part of the community. We have visited P.T.'s homes for the elderly,

infirm, and retarded in the U.S. Those homes were superior. In Jonestown the elderly receive superior health care. They work and contribute to the community life as they are able. One woman was out hoeing her own little garden. Others had picket fences around their houses. I know of no retirement home which provides better food and health care and a more wholesome environment. They are part of a community with babies and children as well as of young people and adults. This fact is a two way street, benefiting the young as well as the old. When I saw the woman hoeing, I thought of Micah's words "...they shall sit every one under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid:...." The fears that are a part of city life are gone.

The Project has expertise and inexperience. They are proceeding by trial and error. They have had serious accidents, but no fatalities. (Jim Jones' mother died and is buried there.) An agronomist, with a B.S., supervises their farming. They turn to the best advice they can find in Guyana and outside for assistance. A man from an urban area is in charge of the piggery. Another man with no experience is in charge of the chickery. In both instances they have been successful and are learning. Young people who have never had opportunities to learn trades or skills are being given these opportunities now.

The morale is high. There is no possible way for this Project to succeed apart from high morale. No one is paid anything. Everyone eats the same food and sleeps in comparable quarters. Everyone is expected to work. Workers were in the fields early in the morning. They do a lot of work with manual labor, even while they are bringing in some labor saving devices. There is no way they could have done what they have done apart from hard work on the part of many men and women. I was asked by a reporter if I had asked people if they were happy. AS I thought about that question later, it seemed like asking people celebrating at a party if they were happy, or coming down out of the stands and asking members of the team who were moving the ball toward a touchdown if they were happy.

Some parents have charged P.T. with brainwashing their children, (who are in their twenties and older.) and holding them against their will. We saw nothing to suggest any truth in this. Furthermore, I am much more ready to believe that P.T. would expend energy to facilitate unhappy people leaving the Project rather than expending energy to restrain people. In my judgment, they simply do not have the luxury of using any energy to restrain and coerce people. They need all of the energy they can muster devoted to their common task of developing that land and becoming self-sufficient.

The project is entitled "Peoples' Temple Cooperative Agricultural Project. The people working in specific areas meet regularly, sometimes daily, to discuss their work. Suggestions and criticisms are encouraged.

The Project provides an opportunity for some to use education and skills, and for others the opportunity to try new things. The man in charge of the piggery is from Chicago. An attorney is developing the winged bean and citrus crops. Young people for whom doors in the city were closed are learning mechanical and agricultural skills.

I would add to the paragraph on the cooperative the following. There is a sense of ownership which is not present under private ownership. I suspect that this same sense of ownership is often absent even where the legal ownership is corporate, including the workers. The people give themselves in hard work, in part because it is their project. All share the same food and housing. I think that all spend some time in manual labor.

I had a feeling that everybody was somebody. I thought of Israel's understanding of itself, and later the church's self-understanding: "We who were nobody are now God's people." Being somebody is more than corporate identity. People in the Project give the feeling that they are somebody, not simply because they identify with the Project, but in their own right. One woman has the house of her dreams. Other older people tend their own gardens, sing and entertain. While we were in Georgetown, an older woman with a speech impediment, perhaps from a stroke, was waiting eagerly to go to Jonestown. She flew in with us. That night during the entertainment she was keeping time to the music with her cane and swaying. A boy of nine or ten flew in with us. He had been in Georgetown while his artificial leg was lengthened. We met his brother in Jonestown. He is bent with a disfigured spine. In the states he knew the ridicule of playmates. Here there's a different sensitivity. An accountant is using his experience in the business affairs of the church. A lawyer is teaching. Young adults who've come through the drug scene are engaged in significant work. I think that it was Dostievsky who said that a society could be measured by the way it treats people in prison. Surely the humanness of any community is to be seen in part by its inclusion of the children and the elderly, the infirm and those of limited abilities.

The project provides for maximization of deep relationships between people of varying ages, men and women, and of different races, cultural and class backgrounds. The contribution of the nuclear family is strengthened within this kind of a community.

The community has dealt with drug use through negotiation. The young agreed to abstain from the use of drugs while the adults agreed to abstain from the use of tobacco and liquor. These drugs are not a part of the life of the community.

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