

CHAPTER SIX

The Politics of Peace 1948-1952

THE DISINTEGRATION of the "rice miller game" made possible the elimination of factional politics provided that a powerful or power-seeking individual would not mobilize political support for local competition. In Rajgahr Village during the late forties, major changes in the structure and allocation of resources prevented the socio-economic conditions which made factionalism a viable political strategy. First, an economic expansion increased available resources which remained, for a time, sufficiently diffuse to allow the majority of villagers to obtain what they considered their fair share. Competition for scarce resources was eliminated and the elite was able to maintain its position without being divided by factional leadership or challenged by popular discontent. Second, major national political movements siphoned political activists from the village to the national arena. The result was a "political peace", a period of prosperity, and satisfaction within the village as to "the way things were going."

This chapter discusses first the economic changes and the national political arena and second, the effects of both on local politics. Finally, the factional peace is described and the role of the village council, long an arena of competition, is examined in the light of changes in the structure of economy and polity.

Economic Expansion and Political Extension

During this period, all sectors of the village economy (rice, sugar, provisions) were expanding; a new industry of large-scale cattle-rearing developed; and major alterations occurred in the means of production. Family groups, regardless of their household economy, could expand with only minimal competition with others. In brief, there appeared to be enough for everyone. As result, families mobilized for expansion and, by doing so, stimulated other families to do the same. What were these economic alterations, opportunities, and resources which constituted the expansion?

It has been noted that in 1920, villagers had two economic options: to extend their rice-growing capabilities into the Abary Creek area, or to maintain the original pattern of supplementing local rice production with wage and/or estate labour. Thirty years later, these choices still affected economic opportunities. Leases taken

out on Abary first-depth land legally entitled lessees to have first option on subsequent depths. A family which had chosen wage labour found it difficult to change their strategy to Abary cultivation. As a result, changes in the sugar industry, the major source of wage labour opportunities, were crucial.

During the forties,

a notable record of growth reflects the decision by management in the later 1940's to take the risky course of rapid expansion in the hope of obtaining a larger share of the [sugar] market especially in the quotas to be assigned under the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement which was then under discussion (Reubens, 1962: 18).

This expansion resulted in new employment opportunities which peaked in 1949 and which continued to require a "work force that was virtually stable during 1949-1954" (Reubens, 1962: 19). Employment histories of a sample of villagers in the labour market at the time indicate that this directly benefitted those villagers who had chosen to combine wage labour with rice cultivation.

Families who had chosen to expend labour and capital in the Abary area in the 1920's could also expand as land, labour, and capital became available. Additional land was a direct result of their having beneficially occupied the first depth. Applications to the Department of Lands and Mines were automatically granted. The decision to apply for further acreage, however, was based on a family's assessment as to whether labour and capital were available. In most cases, the developmental cycle of households meant that adult children could provide the necessary labour. Sahidan and Amin, for example, had five sons. All were married; the eldest had children just reaching adolescence; the youngest, married only two years, had one small child. The sons wanted to expand—the more land taken up, the more to divide as the inheritance, and the more each nuclear unit would obtain. All co-operated in working the second and third depths of the Abary Creek area. Similar attitudes were found among many Rajgahr families and the period was characterized by extended family co-operation to enable land expansion. The capital for land development and improvement, such as drainage facilities, was derived from the funds which had accumulated after the end of the indebtedness cycle to the miller and before the expansion. At a minimum, the twelve percent interest paid to the millers was available as savings. There had also been little capital expenditure during the interim period; surplus cash had been accumulating for at least five years. With this capital, with labour, and with empty Abary tracts, possibilities for expansion seemed unlimited.

Nor was this attitude towards expansion solely the prerogative of the Abary cultivator. Those families with dual occupations found not only an expanding market for their labour, but expanding rice acreage within the village proper, the focal point for their cultivation activities. In late 1947, the village council applied for an additional 1,350 acres to be used for rice cultivation by local authority tenants

in the New Expansion area which lay immediately behind the New Lands area. The application was granted as was a loan of \$13,913.12 to develop the land for cultivation.¹ In allocating the land to tenants, the council adopted two principles. First, although land was rented to individuals, any group could be allocated their total individual allotments in one "block". This was to permit greater efficiency by reducing travelling time between plots and enabling labour co-operation. This council decision encouraged extended family co-operation. The second principle concerned the amount of land to be allocated. This was based on the amounts tenants had previously rented. Since this varied, a basic inequality in access was established. For the moment, however, everyone shared in the new land and was content. Land empoldering was completed in 1949 and the first crop reaped in November. The yields were excellent, far superior to those of the farmed-out New and Jib Lands.²

In addition to rice expansion in two areas, the Grow More Food Campaign was continued. During the war, increased provisions production and the concomitant reduction of imported foodstuffs had created a ready local market. After the war, several Rajgahr Village Councillors were appointed to the Campaign's regional committees while the government supplied seedlings and roots as encouragement. With rice acreage expanding behind the Crown Dam, more cultivation plots were turned into provisions farms³ thereby continuing the diversification process as a cushion against crop failure and as an additional source of subsistence and cash.

Another major expansion in the economic base was the development of a large-scale cattle industry. East Indians in Guyana always had been associated with cattle-rearing. Indentured labourers often had been permitted to keep a few head on plantation scrub land and after indenture, at the turn of the century, East Indians controlled the country's milk and cattle industry⁴ not only because of the large number of estate cattle but because in many villages, cattle rearing had become the primary industry.⁵ In Rajgahr, with rice the basis of the village economy, cattle could only be kept on the village scrub land between the public road and seashore and on the lands which later became the New Expansion area. Even with the Abary expansion in the 1920's, there was no excess land for cattle. Their numbers were, therefore, small and they mainly provided a household milk supply. However, the Abary expansion into the second and third depths, each fifteen to twenty acres, meant that farmers had more land than they could cultivate. Abary farmers therefore invested in cattle,⁶ and with the large amount of grazing land relative to that available in the

1 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, September 15, 1947.

2 Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969 and Dagleish, February 1970.

3 *Ibid.*

4 According to the Reports of the Immigration Agent General cited in Chapter IV.

5 Professor Lesley Potter, personal communication.

6 Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969; Amin Mohamed and Alla Mohamed, January 1970.

village, the size of herds increased and their function changed. Cattle became "insurance policies", reared as a product easily convertible to cash. Further, since herds were now located so far from the village, they could no longer be milked. Some families, therefore, kept several milch cows in the village while those families with Abary land became committed to a major new industry, beef production.

Alongside of these changes were alterations in how the economic base could be most profitably exploited. Mechanization and the co-operative movement both stimulated the expansion and came into prominence because of the expansion.

The use of machinery for rice cultivation was not unknown to the villagers. As early as 1914 the Abary Company had used steam-driven tractors on their land grant adjacent to the village. Such machinery was too costly for farmers at that time and was also impractical on muddy ground.⁷ Villagers, however, were aware of the potential of mechanization. When an alternative became available, they were quick to adopt it.

In 1944, the Rice Marketing Board was experimenting with this alternative in the Mahaicony area. By 1949, tractors and combines had been imported⁸ and the Board had instituted easy payment terms.⁹ The mechanization of the rice industry developed rapidly.¹⁰ In Rajgahr, villagers quickly recognized that the technology would allow the extensive exploitation of the new lands in both Rajgahr and the Abary. The first tractor in the village appeared in 1949 in association with the first village co-operative, also a production innovation.

Persons working together as groups which were based on ties other than extended kinship had not been necessary until agriculture required a large capital outlay for land development and for machinery which, to be efficient, had to be extensively utilized. The first such group began as an informal association and culminated in a licensed co-operative under the Co-operative Ordinances.

At night, about five of us used to sit and discuss the new machinery. Dyal Dabi read that the Rice Marketing Board was giving loans for machinery with easy terms of payment. We wrote to the Board and asked for a catalogue. We discussed the types and... went to MARDS and saw how the tractor worked. ...We decided to buy it. We went to the Rice Marketing Board, ...discussed payment and decided to put \$2,000 down. So we got five more people and we each paid \$200. We didn't know anything about a co-operative yet; we just joined together. We got the tractor in December 1948 and also... booked ourselves for a tractor-drawn combine. When we got the tractor, we went through the village and everyone had a grand spree. In 1948, when the New Empolder was taken up, our group managed to get a hundred and

7 Interview with Amin Mohamed, February 1970.

8 Report of the British Guiana Rice Marketing Board, 1949-1950. Fourth Legislative Council, Fourth Session, 1951, page 9.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*, page 4.

thirty-one acres. The council did not give it to the society, but to us as individuals. But we got it in one block. After ploughing we decided that we needed some rules. So we went to a solicitor who told... us about this man who had come to form co-operatives. He sent him to see us. He came with leaflets and lectured about co-operatives... We got registered and became the first producers' co-operative... During that first year, we reaped a good crop, twenty-eight hundred bags of padi, and in August, we got the combine. We paid off all our indebtedness and members' wages. It all went very well for a few years. We all worked together and ate together at the camp we had built on our land. We dried our own padi on a drying floor in the camp while it was being reaped, and we shipped it out by boat. By 1952 the hundred and thirty-one acres couldn't sustain us. So we... rented a hundred and seventy-five acres from Puri in Armadale. To put this land in order, we took in two more members who had tractors but only small scattered land holdings.¹¹

Between 1948 and 1952, there were economic opportunities for villagers, regardless of household strategy, with returns in all spheres (rice, estate labour, provisions and cattle) secure. Simultaneously, kin collaboration or a formal co-operative which crosscut kin groupings encouraged the interrelated processes of expansion and mechanization. Of most importance, the new resources and opportunities were sufficiently extensive to create a semblance of equality in access. As will be seen, this prevented the emergence of competing interest groups and of factional leadership for economic gain.

Relevant to this were political changes on the national level. Dr. Cheddi Jagan emerged as a charismatic nationalist leader. This provided alternatives to local political competition and introduced new criteria for political affiliation. Dr. Jagan's emergence was via the trade union movement and a nationalist political party.

The trade union movement in Guiana, as in most underdeveloped countries, has been the major platform from which political careers are launched. An early case in point is the Man Power Citizens' Association [MPCA], the first union organized to represent the interests of East Indian sugar workers. (Despres, 1967: 153). The union was officially recognized by the Sugar Producers' Association in 1939 [and reported] a membership of 20,970 workers... During the war years, [however] the union was able to accomplish little... [and] also... seems to have developed a cordial relationship with the Sugar Producers' Association. By 1946, ... its treasurer, Cheddi Jagan, resigned his position and criticised the organization as having become fully identified with sugar interests. With Dr. Lachmansingh, ... Jagan organized the Guiana Industrial Workers' Union... The GIWU embarked upon a program designed to wean sugar workers away from the MPCA and to replace it as a bargaining agent. ... The union [gained] the loyalty... of most of the sugar workers and... [operated] under Jagan's influence (*Ibid.*: 156).¹²

11 Interview with Seeram Bhagwandin, member of the Rajgahr Rice Growers' Co-operative, December 1971.

12 Personal communication with Leo Despres.

With this resource, Jagan formed, in 1946, the Political Affairs Committee for the purpose of political education through evening classes and a monthly newsheet. He was also elected to the Legislative Council in 1947. In January 1950, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) was formed out of the Political Affairs Committee and the British Guiana Labour Party.¹³ The government and news media immediately labelled the new party "communist". The party, however, held together despite latent antagonisms over ideology and began to prepare for the 1953 elections (Smith, R., 1962: 166-170).

Between its founding and the election campaign, Rajgahr residents were exposed to much media publicity on the party's political leanings. Many had also come into contact with both the party and union because of their estate employment—villagers were very aware of the party's existence and the strength it was gathering. The party formally entered Rajgahr in 1950 with its first public meeting in the village. People came for "a look see" and to decide for themselves what it was all about.¹⁴

Within the year, the party had consolidated a number of extremely committed villagers who began carrying out a propaganda and politicization programme within the village.¹⁵ Three tiers of political affiliation came into existence. There was, first, a small group of activists led by Dabi Maraj, the son of Manraj, a close relative to the Panchars, and significantly, a first cousin to J. P. Lachmansingh, Dr. Jagan's major organizer. Critical support came as well from non-elite villagers: both Drepaul Bharat and Samuel Dookhun¹⁶ were relatively poor men, but with the PPP, political influence was accessible to them. The second tier was composed of strong PPP supporters mobilized mainly through extended kin links: the Bhagwandins, Loknauths, Panchars, and the small family groups of Bharat and Dookhun. The final tier was the village mass, highly sympathetic to the PPP but uncertain as to the efficacy of national party politics within the village arena.¹⁷

There were immediate effects. The attention of families which always had been politically active was directed outward from the village to the 1953 national elections. Second, a new leader of the Maraj-Bhagwandin-Panchar family had mobilized relationships from among the extended kin group, but his attention also was directed outward, mainly toward his campaign for a Legislature seat. Finally, a new avenue of mobility had emerged: Dookhun and Bharat, under traditional circumstances, could never have been influential in the village.

13 This party was founded in 1946, contested the election in 1947, but broke into competing factions immediately after.

14 Interview with Dagleish, October 1969, Petamber Singh, October 1969; and P. T. Preamsingh, November 1970.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

A local political leader and the active families were thus competing in another arena. For the villager, this was a "Georgetown story" with which he sympathized and for which he voted, but which did not affect his immediate world.¹⁸ This was a further impetus for the political "peace".

Arenas of Conciliation

Local political interaction during this period was characterized by appeasement and arbitration in all arenas previously marked by competition. This was because the resource structure constrained factional strategies and made conciliation the more logical way to achieve economic and political goals. Specifically, the elite's absolute control over the economy had ended and the economic expansion precluded support of a factional leader as necessary for a family to exploit economic alternatives. In fact, a leader would have had great difficulty mobilizing support since the basic transactional relationship was not in demand; no one had anything that really required a political exchange relationship. Further, the individualist nature of the economic expansion created crosscutting commitments; alliances in one context could not be maintained in others. Subversions would occur continuously and the cost of factional maintenance would be highly inflated. Additionally, the traditional leadership, the elite, were themselves engaged in their own expansion. Divided by crosscutting interests, governed by minimal competition and individualism, their economic efforts could be successful without political encumbrances. They could choose only those alliances which were situationally specific and low cost. This strategy was made possible because their elite position was not under any systematic attack; villagers were busy elsewhere. There was therefore no incentive for either elite unification or elite competition. Factionalism had become a poor political strategy since the costs of mobilization, maintenance and deployment were too high and—most important—because factionalism was not a prerequisite for economic gain or political maintenance for either villagers or the elite.

With this constraint, the village council remained an elite body vis-à-vis the village population. Since the populace continued to provide the electoral base, this was apparently acceptable. Internally, the council consisted of individuals each with personal vested interests which were never totally coterminous with those of any other councillor. Three unique patterns of council functioning emerged. First, the council was appealed to as a mediating body by protagonists in disputes with fellow villagers; in conflicts between short-term interest groups; and in disputes between villagers and outside legal authorities. As an unchallenged elite body, the council sought compromises between those parties which had come forward for conciliation.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Second, when dispute settlement, administration, and policy decisions concerned the elite itself, individualism, shifting alliances and vested interests resulted in attempts at decision-making through compromise. If this failed, voting procedures were used. Since each councillor found himself in alternate alliances for different situations, there were never competing "teams" on council; mobilization by a leader never occurred.

Third, and crosscutting the above two patterns, was the nature of elite-mass interaction. Since the councillors depended on popular support, they had to support the causes of villagers. Thus, in administration and policy decisions which concerned the mass but from which the elite itself was aloof, the emphasis was on compromise with an eye towards public opinion. In cases of conflicting interests between a councillor and villager, the villager's claims were seldom subordinated because the other councillors were concerned with popular support.

Buttressing these three interactive patterns was an explicit ideology which characterized this factional peace: an acceptance of compromise and a notion of the "common good" which had to be served. Not incidentally, the ideology also provided the rationale for elite maintenance. So long as the economy minimized competition between segments and individuals, the universally supported political "peace" could be maintained.

These general patterns can be clearly seen in the voting patterns for chairman and for the deputy positions which took place in December of each year; in the council's voting patterns over the six-year period; in the elections of councillors; and in situational analyses.

In 1946, Gerald Panchar and Petamber Singh were unanimously elected chairman and deputy without opposition.¹⁹ In 1947, 1948 and 1949, the positions were also filled by unanimous consent and without opposition candidates.²⁰ In all the cases, councillors met before the formal election meeting and reached a consensus.²¹ In 1950, Ramprashad nominated Dagleish, an unsanctioned candidate, for the chairmanship. Dagleish refused the nomination.²² In the same election, two councillors, dissatisfied over a particular issue, nominated another candidate; they were the only two councillors who voted for that nominee.²³ A similar situation occurred the following year. The two unsanctioned nominations were not, however, made by the same persons as in the previous year. Again the motivation was based on dissatisfaction with a particular issue. In this case, one of the nominations was not seconded while in the second case, the unsanctioned nominee himself voted for the prearranged

¹⁹ Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, December 20, 1946.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, December 1947; 1948; and 1949.

²¹ Interview with Dagleish, October 1969 and Petamber Singh, October 1969.

²² Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, December 1950. Interview with Dagleish, October 1969 and Petamber Singh, October 1969.

²³ *Ibid.*

candidate.²⁴ He stated that he "did not want to cause divisions".²⁵ In the 1952 elections the chairman again was elected unanimously while two other nominees refused to accept. A vote was taken for the position of deputy because two unwarranted persons were nominated. Again, the nominators were different than in the previous two years and the prearranged candidate won easily.²⁶

In the case of council voting patterns on issues brought forward as motions, the council arrived at unprecedented unanimity. Of seventy-two motions before the council during the period,²⁷ thirty-eight or 52.7 percent were decided upon unanimously. Of the remainder, the voting patterns reveal no consistent divisions among the various personnel.

Finally, the ideology of peace and unanimity was expressed in the way councillors were elected. For example, at a proprietors' meeting in 1949, council nominations were taken openly and "no one else stood up except those nominated". All councillors were chosen by acclamation and election costs avoided.²⁸ Similarly in 1952, in a by-election to fill the seat of Gerald Panchar who had died two months before, Jori Jawahir was elected by acclamation.²⁹ Further, Panchar's chairmanship was unanimously filled by Dagleish³⁰ whose deputy chairmanship was unanimously filled by Hussein Amin.³¹

In addition to intra-council and council-mass interaction, individual councillor-villager relations exhibited the same pattern of conciliation. The villager Mongal applied to rent a piece of land already rented to a councillor. To avoid complications the council not only disapproved Mongal's application but also cancelled the councillor's permission.³² In like vein, when villager Beharry accused councillor Petamber Singh of cultivating a portion of his rice land and an argument ensued at a council meeting, the council made "an amicable settlement by having Singh perform the labour expended by Beharry". Beharry then apologized and withdrew his comments against Singh.³³ At a later date, Petamber Singh tried to obtain additional village land by having the overseer, a personal friend, allocate the land to his aunt, a non-

24 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, December 1951. Interview with Dagleish, October 1969 and Petamber Singh, October 1969.

25 Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969.

26 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, December 1952. Interviews with Dagleish, October 1969 and Petamber Singh, October 1969.

27 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, 1948-1952.

28 Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969 and Dagleish, October 1969.

29 Letter from A. Chesney, Returning Officer, to the District Commissioner, New Amsterdam, October 28, 1952.

30 Letter from the District Commissioner, New Amsterdam, to the Commissioner of Local Government, October 1, 1952.

31 Letter from the District Commissioner, New Amsterdam, to the Commissioner of Local Government, October 10, 1952.

32 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, December 1, 1947.

33 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, July 1948.

proprietor living in the East Coast Demerara. The council cancelled the allocation.³⁴ In the interaction between council elites and villager, the council aimed at maintaining popular support; at continuing the semblance of equality in access to resources; and at ensuring peaceful interaction by playing an adjudicating role.

As noted, farmers had been transferred to the New Empolder from the Jib and New Lands in order to allow the latter to lie fallow. The New Empolder was divided into two sections, the Greek block section and the Road section.³⁵ In allocating the lands, the council attempted to give land in blocks to families and voluntary groups while still maintaining an orderly distribution to avoid disputes over which allotments were more arable. An allocation list was drawn up and persons were given land in turn, from west to east, wherever this land fell. As requested, the members of the Rajgahr Rice Growers Co-operative received their land in a block. They immediately complained that it was too swampy.³⁶ They asked Ramprashad to plead their case by putting forward to the council the view that the land should have been shared from east to west rather than west to east. This would have allotted them dryer land. At a special council meeting, Ramprashad asked that all lands be redistributed. Councillors Ramhit and Petamber Singh were vehemently against this. Panchar expressed satisfaction with the Road Section but felt the Creek Block section should be redistributed. The council's final solution was to make allowances for the swampy areas by allotting the society additional land while continuing to allocate from west to east as had been decided.³⁷ Underlying this solution were particular dynamics: Ramprashad supported the co-operative members to gain popular support with the help of chairman Dagleish who called the special meeting to discuss the matter. At the meeting, however, his case conflicted with the interests of Petamber Singh and Ramhit, both of whom had land in the Road Section which they did not want to lose in a reallocation. Panchar took on the conciliatory role. He accepted³⁸ the interests of both parties when he agreed that the Road Block allocations be maintained but the Creek Block area be reallocated. The way was then clear for the council to retain the original allocation system while giving the Co-operative an allowance for the creek hands.

In later months, however, the Co-operative's membership increased, and as individual allotments were added to the pool, the society began to become economically powerful. Panday, a society member, had land on the Left Bank Abary as did Gaffur Gobin. The latter applied to the council for his Rajgahr land to be transferred to Panday since Panday had offered Gobin his land on the Left Bank Abary

34 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, March 7, 1949.

35 The Road section lies immediately behind the New Lands and extends to the No. 6 Crown Dam. Stretching from this Crown Dam to the Abary Creek is the Creek Block section.

36 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, February 7, 1949.

37 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, February 12, 1949.

38 Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969.

in exchange. The council refused the application stating that Panday had enough Rajgahr land; that the Abary lands were not under the council's control; and that the council preferred to give other tenants any excess land rather than to expand the holdings of one person.³⁹ A year later and for a similar reason, two Narain brothers asked to have their lands in the New Empolder transferred to the Co-operative. The council refused, unanimously, since councillors felt that the Co-operative had enough land.⁴⁰

When an outside body appeared as a threat, the council reacted as a unit. This was possible in the Co-operative case since none of the councillors were members. Coupled with this guarding of council prerogatives was the maintenance of a balance between potentially competing village groups, a strategy which also enhanced popular support. In this case, consolidation of extensive village holdings was considered detrimental to the small holder and to the council's popular image. In keeping with this, the council began to disallow direct transfers of village land from one person to another since an individual could have a friend or relative rent land which would then be transferred. To prevent such ploys, the council instituted the policy that lands be surrendered first to council. The council thus appropriated the right of reallocation and did this according to a villager's date of application.⁴¹

In addition to this careful guarding of council powers while maintaining a popular balance, council business was often phrased in terms of the "common good". When proprietors approached councillor Petamber Singh as to the possibility of a gate being built in a new fence, Singh presented the application to the council "on behalf of the people who needed an easy means of ingress and egress". The council agreed to the application unanimously.⁴²

These policies established the council as a mediator in disputes which were only of indirect concern. For example, Cecil Seeram complained to council that Imdad Usman had ploughed under a portion of his rice. Usman maintained that he saw a paal and assumed his land stretched that far. The council convinced Usman to replant Seeram's land and at the same time, decided to remeasure the land and move the paal to its proper place.⁴³

In the hiring and dismissing of village officials, the council arrived at unprecedented consensus: of eighteen decisions, thirteen were unanimous.⁴⁴ The council did not have to give priority to the incumbent's political leanings and any

39 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, April 11, 1949. Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969 and Dagleish, October 1969.

40 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, April 3, 1950. Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969, and Dagleish, October 1969.

41 *Ibid.*

42 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, September 25, 1949. Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969.

43 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, June 9, 1952.

44 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, 1947-1952.

votes were due to personal conflicts or threats to vested interests. Ranger Teekah provides a case in point. Councillor Ramhit developed a strong distaste for this ranger who had reported to council that Ramhit illegally drove his cattle daily to graze in the New Empolder. A similar altercation occurred between Teekah and councillor Jowahir. As a result, the two councillors continually presented complaints to the council and motions for Teekah's dismissal.⁴⁵ The more Ramhit complained about Teekah, however, the more Teekah took special care to report Ramhit's infractions of village by-laws, such as the councillor having used posts from a local authority fence to brace his tractor in the mud. Ramhit voted against Teekah's confirmation as ranger and accused him of using local authority workers to repair his house.⁴⁶

This dynamic of individualism also affected the council's general policy decisions. For example, the Jib lands were lying fallow⁴⁷ while renters planted the New Empolder area. On two occasions, a motion was presented to rent out the Jib. Ramhit voted for the motion⁴⁸ since he had just invested in machinery and wanted more land.⁴⁹ Hussein Amin suggested that only the Jib area between No. 6 Crown Dam and the Abary be rented out for cultivation. This would enable cattle pasturing on the other half which was near enough to the village to allow large-scale milking.⁵⁰ Amin was a large cattle owner. Dagleish, a driver at Bath estate with no real investment in rice or cattle, maintained that the land should be left idle.⁵¹

About the same time, two Armadale cultivators applied to the council to rent the entire New Lands area for rice. In return, they offered the fifth depth of their Armadale land for Rajgahr cattle. Their reasoning was that the superior Rajgahr drainage was more suitable for rice, while the poorer Armadale drainage would not affect cattle to the same extent. Amin strongly objected, stating that the New Lands should be left idle.⁵² He kept his cattle in the New Lands and the Armadale area was savannah with no high places for cattle during flooding. Mahatma Deeroop supported the application; one of the applicants was his brother. Narain also agreed since he wanted the increased revenue for the council. Ramhit agreed because he wanted more land to plant.⁵³ The Rajgahr cattle owners subsequently made strong objections. The application was then withdrawn with the council's unanimous approval.⁵⁴

45 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, May 1, 1950.

46 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, March 7, 1949 and July 3, 1950.

47 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, April 19, 1950 and November 13, 1950.

48 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, November 13, 1950.

49 Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969.

50 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, April 17, 1950.

51 *Ibid.* Interview with Dagleish, October 1969.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*

54 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, April 19, 1950.

A final feature of council was its defence of members' interests when conflict could not be satisfactorily arbitrated. In 1948, both David Panchar, a brother of Gerald, and Samuel Dookhun applied to buy houselot 26D, containing the mill's drying floor. The lot was in fact illegally occupied by the Panchars who had never formally rented it nor paid rates. Dookhun had learned of this through his father, the former village overseer, and applied for the lot because of enmity between his father and the Panchars over a prior land dispute. The councillors suggested various possibilities for settlement but both parties refused to compromise. The council sold Panchar the lot.⁵⁵

The "peace" within the council arena had its counterpart in other village arenas largely because the council served as a resource for conciliation: villagers appealed to it for arbitration in potentially disruptive situations. Such appeals were due to three related factors: the obvious success of the council as an impartial mediator; the absence of competition for bipartisan political support; and the individualist nature of most disputes. With every family concerned with its own enterprises in an open economy, disputes were not translated into a political or competitive idiom. The race club arena is a case in point. In 1938, the arena was a direct extension of council competition when a major political encounter occurred between two factional leaders. In 1948, however, when two villagers applied to hold race meetings at the same time, the council suggested that the two combine their meetings and submit a joint application. Both agreed⁵⁶ and the races were held without incident.⁵⁷

Finally, what was to become a critical conflict between cattle owner and rice farmer surfaced during this period but was held in check by the conciliatory strategy. In general, opposing interests had always existed over the relative allocation of rice land as opposed to cattle pasture and over cattle wandering into cultivation areas and destroying crops. Since no pasturage had been laid out in village plans, scrub land behind the cultivated areas and land near the seashore were used for agisting cattle and oxen. The council had always built and maintained fences to minimize the danger of wandering cattle, but the Abary expansion had greatly expanded their numbers and large owners used Rajgahr land to conserve the pasturage of their Abary holdings.⁵⁸ Simultaneously, the conversion of over 1,800 acres in the New Empolder to rice cultivation, eliminated a large amount of *de facto* pasturage. The Jib and New Lands, lying fallow, provided an alternative, but this area was smaller than the New Empolder and the possibility of cattle wandering into cultivation areas was heightened due to its location. Pasturage had decreased; herd size had increased; and the dangers to cultivation were increased.

55 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, April 5, 1948.

56 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, October 4, 1948.

57 Interview with Petamber Singh, October 1969, and Dagleish, October 1969.

58 Interview with Amin Mohamed, September 1969. Abary pasturage is low quality, requiring the proportion of two acres for one animal.

In 1948, the council constructed fences,⁵⁹ authorized stray catchers, and provided legal fees when cattle owners sued for illegal impounding.⁶⁰ A watch-house was built at the Crown Dam to facilitate the guarding of crops.⁶¹ At the same time, the council carefully tried to preserve the delicate balance of differential land allocation, a policy made possible largely because councillors themselves were divided on the issue. Some councillors wanted to extend the rice area into the Jib and New Lands both to increase the council's revenue and to obtain more land. This was countered by councillors who were cattle owners and by councillors who had no real interests in either rice or cattle. Several motions to extend the rice lands were defeated by this balance. Simultaneously, the council lowered agistment rates on cattle and built high spots in the New Lands for animals during the rainy season.⁶² Finally, the council arranged settlements between disputants in cases of crop damage. Thus, through land distribution and conciliatory actions, the council refrained from a political definition of the situation and mediated the "malice and vengeance between farmers and cattle owners".⁶³

During this period, the village again became involved in a longstanding dispute with Golden Grove Village, immediately to the west, over which village controlled the western dam which separated the two. According to Rajgahr informants, a paal, signifying the boundary, had originally been located on the extreme western side of the dam thereby implying Rajgahr ownership. The dam had eroded, however, and someone had moved the paal to the dam's centre. Unaware of this, Ramprashad and Thompson, the chairman of Golden Grove, had, in the early forties, accepted the paal as the dividing line and therefore assumed that the dam belonged equally to both villages and that both were responsible for its upkeep.⁶⁴ Subsequently, Rajgahr claimed exclusive ownership, a move precipitated both by territorial chauvinism and by particular policies being perpetuated in Hopetown to the east. The latter's council forbade the sale of village lots to East Indians even if they were residents or renters. The Rajgahr council countered that since Rajgahr was an East Indian settlement, no persons of African descent would be permitted to buy land.⁶⁵ By 1947, the racism derived from the Hopetown incident was transferred to Golden Grove, and the issue of the western dam became a major dispute. The Rajgahr council demanded a surveyor to mark the village boundaries⁶⁶ claiming that the dam was part of the original land grant and had been maintained by Rajgahr since

59 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, March 1, 1948 and March 9, 1948.

60 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, August 20, 1948.

61 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, April 11, 1949.

62 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, March 3, 1952.

63 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, November 6, 1948.

64 Interview with A. B. Raprashad, March 1970.

65 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, January 5, 1948.

66 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, November 6, 1948.

1905. Golden Grove claimed it was a common dam. In September 1949, the Rajgahr council built a fence along the dam, set up barriers, and prosecuted persons destroying these or trespassing.⁶⁷ At this point, the District Commissioner called a joint meeting of both local authorities.⁶⁸ When the Golden Grove representatives failed to come, the Rajgahr council decided to obtain legal advice to protect their dam against "Golden Grove encroachment".⁶⁹ The District Commissioner set another meeting time,⁷⁰ and by March 1950, an agreement was ostensibly reached in which the dam was to be a joint responsibility. However, the Rajgahr council continued to insist on a survey⁷¹ and, two months later, again complained to the District Commissioner that Golden Grove was encroaching on the dam.⁷² A year later, an addendum to the original agreement specified that no works were to be done to the dam without the approval of both local authorities and that proprietors from both villages had toll-free access.⁷³ Later that year, however, Golden Grove refused to help Rajgahr pay repair costs. Thus, between 1948-1952, the council and village were engaged in a dispute with a neighbouring village as an added stimulus to internal cohesion.

In general terms, local stratification was such that the village council represented the elite segment. However, because of the expanding economic resources which were accessible to the majority of villagers, this elite was not being challenged by any population section. Further, crosscutting interests within both the elite and the mass made vertical mobilization an unnecessary and impractical strategy; economic ends could in any case be achieved without political competition. With an entrenched elite and an ideology of benevolent paternalism, conciliation was the norm. The council elite mediated disputes between councillors and villagers; between villagers; and between councillors. Additionally, groups attempting economic consolidation were thwarted by a populist ideology through which the elite maintained its position. This strategy of elite maintenance was ultimately made possible by the extensive availability of economic resources. Briefly put, diffuse resources, crosscutting interests political mobilization as impractical strategy, maintenance of the stratification pattern, populist ideology, and conciliation policies by the elite, all interrelated to form the "politics of peace".

67 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, September 25, 1949.

68 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, November 14, 1949.

69 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, December 5, 1949.

70 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, February 6, 1950.

71 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, March 21, 1950.

72 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, May 1, 1950.

73 Minutes of the Rajgahr Village District, September 15, 1951.