

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 76

The world of agriculture and the right to work

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“Agricultural labour merits special attention, given the important social, cultural and economic role that it continues to play in the economic systems of many countries and also considering the many problems that need to be met in the context of an ever more globalised economy as well as its growing significance in safeguarding the natural environment. ‘Radical and urgent changes are therefore needed in order to restore to agriculture – and to rural people – their just value as the basis for a healthy economy, within the social community’s development as a whole (*Laborem Exercens*)’.

In the current global environment agriculture must become internationally competitive. But the truth is in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, this may not be possible especially for the small farm sector because of their limited resources and limited size. Therefore in seeking to restore to agriculture its just value as the basis for a healthy economy, opportunities must be created for this group so that small farmers are not left behind.

Agriculture is very important to the society especially as it relates to Trinidad and Tobago’s excessive dependence on food imports. Agriculture has a key role in promoting food and nutrition security and supporting rural livelihoods in a way that ensures rural persons are able to have the same aspirations and quality of life as others in the society.

From a practical standpoint there are several things that can be done to promote agriculture ensuring that it is part of the social community’s development and a healthy economy.

These include:

- Develop and modernise farm and agricultural systems infrastructure to ensure sustainable development in the sector
- Investment in physical infrastructure such as drainage, irrigation, water management, access roads
- Training for agricultural practitioners in all facets of agriculture including marketing, production techniques and financial management
- Promoting access to finance and credit
- Land use management and preserving agricultural land
- Government investment or government facilitating private sector investment in education, social infrastructure, agricultural research, science and technology and other activities that will seek to exploit the agricultural potential in agri-business and agro-processing
- Developing adequate policies and regulations

- Government seeking to improve access to international markets through trade negotiations and economic cooperation with other countries, which will support and encourage producers and entrepreneurs to operate in a competitive global market.

“The profound and radical changes underway at the social and cultural levels also in agriculture and in the more expansive rural world urgently call for a thorough examination of the meaning of agricultural work in its many different dimensions. This is a challenge of great importance that must be met with agricultural and environmental from the past and of developing new perspectives for modern agriculture that is in a position to play a significant role in social and economic life.”

“In some countries a redistribution of land as part of sound policies of agrarian reform is indispensable, in order to overcome the obstacles that an unproductive system of latifundium [condemned by the Church’s social doctrine (*Populorum Progressio*)] places on the path of genuine economic development.

“Developing countries can effectively counter the present process under which land ownership is being concentrated in a few hands if they face up to certain situations that constitute real structural problems, for example legislative deficiencies and delays regarding both recognition of land titles and in relation to the credit market, a lack of concern over agricultural research and training, and neglect of social services and infrastructures in rural areas”.

Trinidad and Tobago also has issues to address regarding land as it relates to agriculture. Some of the major ones include:

- The rapid conversion of prime agriculture land for non-agricultural uses
- Absence of a comprehensive land use physical plan and effective enabling legislation
- Squatter regularisation
- Insecurity of tenure
- Absence of a system for quick resolution of land disputes

“Agrarian reform therefore becomes a moral obligation more than a political necessity, since the failure to enact such reform is a hindrance in these countries to the benefits arising from the opening of markets and, generally, from the abundant growth opportunities offered by the current process of globalisation.”

Next week we move into Part V of Chapter 6: The Rights of Workers

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