

The Small Holdings Department of the Rubber Research Institute of Ceylon

BY

W. I. PIERIS

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

THE Smallholdings Department came into existence as the result of a realization on the part of the Board of Management of the Rubber Research Institute in 1935 that, although large estate owners in Ceylon derived considerable help and benefit from the work of the Institute, there were no facilities whatever to make these benefits available to the small owner. This seemed unreasonable both in view of the fact that small owners possessed an appreciable proportion of the Island's Rubber and contributed the same cess for the maintenance of the Institute as the larger owner.

In September 1935 a technical officer of the Institute (Mr. W. I. Pieris) was sent on a two-months' visit to Malaya to study the Smallholders' Advisory Service of the Rubber Research Institute of Malaya prior to inaugurating a similar service in Ceylon. A start was made with the appointment of two Rubber Instructors at Matugama and Horana in November 1936 to help and advise smallholders of the district and of a Clerk-Translator to attend to clerical work and translate advisory leaflets. As a result of the useful work done by these two Instructors, four additional Instructors for Galle, Kelani Valley, Kandy and Ratnapura were appointed in 1938 and four more for Kegalla, Gampaha, Akuressa and Elpitiya ranges between 1941-1946, making a total field staff of ten. An Assistant Propaganda Officer was appointed to the Department in 1947 to ensure the closer supervision of work in the ranges.

In October 1948 the entire work of the New Rubber Planting Scheme, which was an organisation of considerable magnitude, was taken over, resulting in the staff being increased to a Small Holdings Propaganda Officer, 3 Assistant Propaganda Officers, 4 District Field Officers, 31 Rubber Instructors, 4 Clerks and 2 Peons. At present the Department consists of 46 officers.

FUNCTIONS AND SCOPE

The principal function of the Department is to render free assistance and advice to Rubber Smallholders regarding matters connected with the cultivation, maintenance, manufacture and marketing of rubber. These services, which were previously confined to owners of mature plantations and

replanters, were considerably increased with the taking over of the New Rubber Planting Scheme in 1948, when an additional 50,000 acres (approx.) of young new-planted rubber, mostly budded, came under the special purview of this Department.

There are approximately 655,000 acres of rubber in Ceylon, of which 168,000 acres is in smallholdings of below 10 acres and a further 141,000 acres of small estates of 10–100 acres. The needs of all the 168,000 acres of smallholdings and part of the 141,000 acres of small estates are catered for by the Smallholdings Department. For 1950 approximately 51,000 acres out of the total 655,000 acres in Ceylon consisted of budded rubber, the bulk of which, namely about 39,000 acres, are small estates (10–100 acres) and smallholdings (less than 10 acres) planted under the New Rubber Planting Scheme. Most of these receive the special attention of this Department.

SERVICES RENDERED

The services rendered are varied and comprehensive. No small owner need have a rubber problem today concerning which he cannot obtain free advice from the Smallholdings Department or his local Rubber Instructor, in addition to the many practical benefits he receives in the way of planting material, lining and grants for soil conservation, mesh for strainers, guaranteed acid &c. The 31 Rubber Instructors are stationed in 31 specified ranges which cover all the main rubber districts and each is responsible for the smallholdings in his area. Seven or eight Rubber Instructors are supervised by a District Field Officer, and the divisions of 2 District Field Officers by an Assistant Propaganda Officer.

Systematic visits are paid to holdings by Instructors where talks and demonstrations are given to individuals or groups of smallholders. Practical demonstrations are conducted in sheet-making, tapping, budding, disease-treatment, compost-making, &c. Holdings are lined for contour drains with the road-tracer free of charge, and on new-planting permit-areas grants are paid after the drains are completed. Rs. 14,424, Rs. 5,191 and Rs. 7,942 were paid as grants to 202, 75 and 151 peasant-class permit-holders during 1949, 1950 and 1951 respectively. The work done on each holding is carefully measured, checked and certified by the field staff before a grant is paid.

Frequent visits are paid by Instructors and all stages of work supervised whenever a smallholder is new-planting or replanting his land. Lists of all permits issued by the Rubber Controller are received by the Smallholdings Propaganda Officer and forwarded to the officer of the range concerned, who visits them within two weeks and does all that is necessary to ensure a satisfactory plantation.

General advice and supervision in maintaining, and where necessary replanting, Government Rubber Allotments given to colonists is undertaken. During 1951 all operations in replanting 87 acres of the Urumiwela Allotments

were supervised and approved planting material in the form of clonal seedlings was supplied. All allotments were planted on up-to-date lines with proper soil conservation measures &c., and are making satisfactory growth.

SHEET IMPROVEMENT

Considerable attention is paid to the improvement of smallholders' sheet so that it may fetch the best possible price. Inexpensive wattle-and-daub smokehouses of varying sizes which produce excellent sheet have been designed to suit all classes of small owners. Two demonstration houses are put up in each range annually at Departmental expense and small owners encouraged to build similar ones. Over 250 demonstration and 500 private smokehouses have been built to date under the Department's supervision.

The improvement of sheet by co-operative methods, where several small owners form themselves into a Rubber Co-operative Society and bring their latex to one centre to be converted by a trained rubber maker into grade I sheet, has been given considerable attention. The Hataraliyadda Rubber Co-operative Society, initiated by this department, has proved a great success and other similar societies have been formed by this department at Dapiligoda, Kahagalla, Aruppola, Dediya-gala and Maliduwa. The main difficulty in forming more such societies is the trouble that smallholders experience in obtaining an initial loan of Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 3,000 for putting up the necessary smokehouse and coagulating shed and buying a pair of rollers.

Mesh for strainers and reliable acid bottled by the smallholdings department in sealed bottles are sold by Rubber Instructors and delivered to smallholders at concession rates. Quality Certificates and free pans are issued to those who make good sheet.

LATEX CENTRES

The Department has been responsible for organizing a scheme whereby small owners in the Kalutara District could supply their latex to the central buying organization at Katukurunda at rates considerably more advantageous than what they get by making sheet. Latex is brought by each member to a given centre and there "weighed", bulked, ammoniated and handed to the lorry which calls daily. The organization pays 2 cents below the day's top market price of sheet for every pound of dry rubber supplied as latex and also supplies the collecting tanks, &c. Eleven centres are each supplying 20-100 gallons of latex per day at present with considerable benefit to their members. The Centres have applied to the Co-operative Department for registration as Latex Co-operative Societies.

At the commencement of the scheme and before the Latex Corporation was in a position to receive supplies there was some diffidence on the part of the Smallholders in embarking on the project. However, the Rubber

Research Institute itself arranged with the Dapiligoda Smallholders to purchase their latex daily at Ceylon Latex Corporation rates and use it in the Institute's factory at Dartonfield. The trial which extended over several months proved eminently satisfactory and the smallholders in general were convinced of the soundness of the scheme and willingly contracted with the Corporation.

A similar project to cater for areas which cannot at present be served by the Latex Corporation is now under consideration. This involves the establishment of latex centres in unserved districts and arranging for contracts between smallholders' co-operatives and commercial estate factories for the purchase of the latex of the former by the latter for manufacture into pale crepe. It is considered that such a project using existing facilities is preferable to embarking on an expensive scheme of constructing new factories and providing staff for the purpose. Such a project, as the former, however, could after establishment be developed in certain areas where sufficient latex may be available into a smallholders' co-operative crepe factory project.

NEW PLANTING

On taking over the New Rubber Planting Scheme in 1948 it was found that no record existed of the actual condition of the large number of holdings planted under the scheme since 1939. A holding-to-holding survey was, therefore, undertaken in 1949 and an up-to-date record obtained. A total of 20,845 permit-areas were visited by Instructors and returns filled in, in respect of 18,654. Holdings were classified into 3 groups according to their growth. Out of 25,853 acres of middle-class permit areas, 34% fell into "class 1" (i.e. satisfactory growth), another 34% into "class 2" (i.e. growth poor but capable of improvement) and 25% into "class 3" (i.e. very poor growth not likely to make satisfactory plantations). Similarly out of 12,424 acres of peasant-class permit-areas, 34% fell into class 1, 30% into class 2 and 29% into class 3; and out of 698 acres of colony areas, 16% fell into class 1, 26% into class 2 and 51% into class 3. 58% of middle-class, 54% of peasant-class and 54% of colony holdings were found planted with budded rubber, the remainder consisting mainly of ordinary rubber and to a small extent of clonal seedlings.

The survey which took one year to complete also gave much useful information regarding soils, gradients of lands, tapping conditions, soil conservation, &c., on these holdings and has furnished a record of each holding whose future progress will be noted by the staff at each subsequent visit.

The demand for new-planting permits continued during 1951, and 4,213 middle and peasant-class permits covering 6,526 acres were issued by the Rubber Controller on the recommendation of the Smallholdings Department of this Institute. Each land is inspected by a Rubber Instructor before a permit is given. 5,087 inspection reports were sent to the Rubber Controller in 1951.

A close watch is kept on new-planted holdings which are nearing tapping age and Instructors continually visit them and mark tappable trees and direct operations on correct lines. This is important owing to the tendency among smallholders to tap daily, which often results in a high percentage of brown-bast disease on new budded plantations.

PLANTING MATERIAL

The Smallholdings Department supplies large quantities of approved high-yielding planting material to small owners annually. Clonal seedlings, which are hardier and easier to manage, are supplied to such limited extent as they are available, besides fairly large quantities of budded stumps of proved clones like PB. 86. Plants are supplied free to peasants and at a nominal charge to middle-class permit-holders and replanters. In 1951, 48,823 clonal seedlings were issued free and 28,745 sold. 6,925 budded stumps and 280 yards of budwood were also sold. The germination of the clonal seed crop in 1951 was a failure and only 12,000 plants were obtained from 107,000 seed, for 1952 issue. A large nursery of 78,000 ordinary rubber plants was, therefore, laid for budding and issue as budded stumps in October-December 1952. All nurseries are planted and maintained under the supervision of the Department.

REPLANTING

The extent of replanting done by smallholders in Ceylon is quite inadequate and almost negligible in comparison with that done in other Rubber producing countries like Malaya. This is mainly due to the lack of capital. The attention of the authorities has been drawn to the need for providing some financial aid to encourage replanting and it is learnt that Government is considering a "Replanting Subsidy Scheme". A large proportion of smallholdings which were slaughter-tapped during the war years are now uneconomic and need immediate replanting with high yielding material if Ceylon's place in the rubber world is to be maintained.

Replanting work under the supervision of Rubber Instructors was completed on 103 holdings in 1951 comprising 126 acres. Replanting permits issued by the Rubber Controller in 1951, were 96 (covering 160 acres) to holdings of under 10 acres and 227 (6,024 acres) to estates of over 10 acres.

LINING FOR SOIL CONSERVATION

Instructors lined 1,661 acres on 1,350 N. R. P. S. holdings, 131 acres on 109 replanting holdings and 76 acres on 40 mature holdings for contour drains and stone terraces against soil erosion during 1951.

OTHER WORK

Propaganda in improving smallholdings is also carried out by means of leaflets, issued both in Sinhalese and English, on useful rubber subjects, advisory correspondence, competitions, lectures, participation in Agricultural shows, &c.

The following leaflets have been issued :—

- (1) Budding and After-Treatment.
- (2) Replanting.
- (3) Sheet Making and Smoking.
- (4) Tapping of Young Budded Rubber.
- (5) Rubber production on Smallholdings (handbill).
- (6) Scheme for supply of Smallholders' latex to the Latex Corporation, Katukurunda (handbill).

All field staff are given a special course of instruction in Rubber work on first appointment. This consists of a series of lectures as well as practical work in budding, tapping, road-tracing, &c., at the Experimental Station. Nivitigalakele.

STAFF AND LOCATION

The Staff of the Smallholdings Department is distributed as follows :—

OFFICE—

Smallholdings Propaganda Officer—Mr. W. I. Pieris, B. A. (Hort.), Smallholdings Department, Eastern Bank Building, P. O. Box 901, Colombo.

Assistant Propaganda Officer—Mr. N. W. Palihawadane, Smallholdings Department, Eastern Bank Building, P. O. Box 901, Colombo.

Clerical Staff—4 Clerks.

SOUTHERN DIVISION—

Assistant Propaganda Officer—Mr. K. Wilson de Silva, 97, De Alwis Place, Kalutara.

Probationary Assistant Propaganda Officer—Mr. P. W. W. de Silva, 97, De Alwis Place, Kalutara.

District Field Officers—(1) Mr. P. S. G. Cooray, Kuda Uduwa, Horana ; (2) Mr. D. R. Ranwala, Baddegama.

Rubber Instructors at Akuressa, Kamburupitiya, Hiniduma, Talpe, Talgaswela, Pitigala, Meegahatenna, Agalawatta, Matugama, Horana, Padukka, Kesbewa, Talangama, Dompe and Gampaha.

NORTHERN DIVISION—

Assistant Propaganda Officer—Mr. H. H. Peiris, Dehigahapitiya, Getahetta.

District Field Officers—(1) Mr. D. E. A. Abeywickrema, Buluruppe, Hettimulla, Kegalla; (2) Mr. B. D. Pedrick, Gilimale Road, Ratnapura.

Rubber Instructors at Pasyala, Nelundeniya, Warakapola, Undugoda, Kegalla, Mawanella, Galagedera, Nivitigala, Pelmadulla, Kuruwita, Eheliyagoda, Dehiowita, Kosgama, Ruanwella and Ingiriya.