The Impact of Free-Trade Initiatives on the Caribbean Basin

From Democracy to Efficiency in Belize

by
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> The hemisphere is challenged both economically and politically. . . . First, the commanding economic issue in all of Latin America is the impoverishment of its people. . . . The contraction of the hemisphere's economies, and the impoverishment of its people, must be reversed. Real growth must be restored. . . . Second, the political challenge in the hemisphere centers on the legitimacy of government. . . . Powerful forces are on the march in nearly every country of the hemisphere, testing how nations shall be organized and by what processes authority shall be established and legitimized. Who shall govern and under what forms are the central issues in the process of change now under way in country after country throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. . . . We must do all we can to nurture democracy in this hemisphere.
>
> —National Bipartisan Commission
> on Central America, 1984

> Free trade is the fairest form of trade. . . . The Caribbean Basin Initiative's long-term objective has always been to help industries in [Caribbean Basin] countries to become more efficient and competitive in the world market.
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> —U.S. Ambassador to Belize,
> April 26, 1991

Over the past decade and a half, the small economies of the Caribbean have been pushed by international lending institutions to expand their export

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production. Motivated in part by geopolitical cold war concerns, the United States, Britain, and Canada initiated programs to facilitate Caribbean export expansion by extending privileged access to their protected markets for some Caribbean products. Access to these protected markets neither required nor encouraged efficiency in Caribbean production. Indeed, the Caribbean Development Bank recently diagnosed structural problems in Caribbean agriculture that arise from low productivity per man and per acre, which, "when combined with relatively high wages, leads to high production costs in relation to world market prices" (CDB, 1993:37).

When a key political motivation for according trade privileges to the Caribbean disappeared with the end of the cold war, the region faced the "threat of peace" (Dominguez, 1995). No longer strategically important, it began losing its trade privileges as free trade expanded. As free-trade initiatives pit small-scale Caribbean producers head-to-head against large-scale producers in other countries, what will be the consequences for Caribbean economies and peoples? Prognosticators envision two potential scenarios: (1) the collapse of many key Caribbean export industries and the marginalization of the Caribbean as a relatively high-cost, small-scale producer in a world of expanding free trade and (2) the reorganization of production in Caribbean export industries to become more efficient and more competitive with larger-volume producers. Scholars, political leaders, and international lenders addressing the challenges that the Caribbean faces at this juncture present a near consensus: the Caribbean must aggressively pursue efficiency to avoid marginalization (see Bryan, 1995a; CDB, 1993; Watson, 1994a). Recommendations for increasing Caribbean competitiveness include deepening and expanding CARICOM to create a larger market and make more rational use of resources (Bryan, 1995b; Harker, 1995) and developing and applying technological innovations to increase productivity (see CDB, 1993; Watson, 1994b). Some scholars argue for greater investment in "human capital" to increase productivity (Dupuy, 1994), though in the past wage suppression to reduce costs was a more widely used strategy.

Clearly, efforts to reorient policy priorities and redirect the flow of resources in accordance with any of these strategies will be socially contested; these contests will involve the mobilization of ideological resources as well as material ones. The development direction any country takes is shaped both by its integration into the global economic system and by the class alliances its people construct (de Janvry, 1982). Those alliances are forged and sustained not only through the mobilization of material resources but also through the elaboration of discourses that identify shared interests and rally collective agents in support of or opposition to particular policies (Medina, 1997b). As political-economic opportunities shift, so must the discourses that explain, justify, and mobilize people behind particular policy choices.

In this article I examine the use of discursive resources in forging social alliances, focusing on key elements of discourses elaborated in the 1980s: the notions of development and democracy. Development and democracy are terms that have no fixed meanings, though their definitions are often assumed to be self-evident. Both are key elements of what Appadurai calls global "ideoscapes," fluid configurations of ideas, terms, and images derived from Enlightenment ideals that circulate around the globe (1996: 33, 36). As the concepts of democracy and development are transported across national boundaries, their meanings come to vary across particular local contexts, where they are defined through their articulation into specific discourses in support of particular political-economic projects (Escobar, 1995; Hall, 1983; Laclau, 1977). A discourse is a framework of meaning that identifies and links together a set of ideas, institutions, and practices. Discourse "explains"—and thus shapes—material relationships by identifying and legitimating specific goals, establishing contexts in which action toward those goals becomes intelligible, and welding together social alliances in support of particular projects.

Below, I explore the intertwined meanings attributed to development and democracy by U.S. government discourse in the 1980s, their relation to U.S. policies, and their impact on small, dependent nations in the Caribbean, taking Belize as an example. I also explore how Belizeans received these ideas, negotiated local meanings for them, and put them to use in constructing social alliances that could shape policies. Finally, I examine recent shifts in U.S. emphasis from democracy to efficiency and the implications of this shift for Belize in particular and the Caribbean more generally.

U.S.-CARIBBEAN BASIN RELATIONS IN THE 1980S: LINKING DEVELOPMENT WITH DEMOCRACY

U.S. discourse and policies in the 1980s emerged in response to events that occurred in Central America and the Caribbean during the late 1970s. In the Caribbean, the revolutionary New Jewel movement came to power in Grenada in 1979, and the governments of Jamaica and Guyana had also embraced socialism. In Central America, a 1979 revolution brought the Sandinistas to power in Nicaragua, and revolutionary movements were gaining strength in Guatemala and El Salvador. The U.S. government read these movements as challenges to its dominance in the region, and President

Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), launched rhetorically in 1982, was intended to reassert U.S. influence over Central America and the Caribbean by isolating and punishing countries that had embraced social revolutionary movements.[1] In establishing CBI discourse, a National Bipartisan Commission on Central America identified two key challenges facing the United States in the region to its south: "rescuing the hemisphere's troubled economies and establishing principles of political legitimacy" (NBCCA, 1984: 4).[2]

The CBI, which encompassed both Central America and the Caribbean, confronted both challenges simultaneously. Drawing upon the political repertoire of liberalism (Hall, 1986: 63) and dominant constructions of development (Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 1992), CBI discourse defined and valorized the concepts of development and democracy, established axiomatic relations between them, and laid out a course of action for their achievement. In accordance with development discourse generally, the CBI defined development very narrowly as economic growth. The steps leading to development were prescribed in specifically capitalist terms: increased opportunities for capital accumulation would spur increased investment in productive capacity, which would create economic growth. Economic growth would reverse the impoverishment of Latin American peoples through job creation and the downward trickle of wealth. CBI discourse also defined democracy narrowly as a system of government in which authority was exercised by leaders elected through "free and fair" multiparty elections (NBCCA, 1984: 5). CBI discourse drew upon the liberal assertion that market-driven capitalism provides economic freedom and political freedom simultaneously. Liberalism holds that reliance on the market rather than the government to organize economic activity reduces the concentration of power in the government's hands and thus safeguards personal liberties; the separation of economic power from political power allows one to offset the other (Jessop, 1978: 15). Equating capitalism with economic freedom and multiparty electoral systems with political freedom, U.S. discourse posited a causative linkage between capitalist economic development and the consolidation of democracy in which the economic freedom afforded by capitalism would ensure the political freedom provided by democracy.

Whereas capitalist economic growth was causally linked to democracy, U.S. rhetoric similarly linked communism to totalitarianism. State-directed economic planning and state control of the means of production were defined as the denial of economic freedom, while the existence of a single political party represented a corresponding denial of political freedom; one type of unfreedom fostered the other.[3] The National Bipartisan Commission warned that the contraction of national economies and deepening poverty in the hemisphere had been "exploited by hostile outside forces—specifically, by Cuba, backed by the Soviet Union and now operating through Nicaragua—which [would] turn any revolution they capture into a totalitarian state, threatening the region and robbing the people of their hopes for liberty" (NBCCA, 1984: 5). As an antidote to Soviet-Cuban expansionism, the commission prescribed capitalist economic growth to foster democracy, maximize prosperity and liberty, and ward off totalitarianism. However, criticizing previous U.S. policies in the region for having focused too exclusively on economic issues, the commission urged the United States to provide additional resources to strengthen democratic institutions.

Accordingly, the CBI's legislative centerpiece, the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act (CBERA), aimed to expand CBI economies; more specifically, it was designed to expand their production of *exports*. The CBERA provided privileged access to U.S. markets for CBI countries by eliminating U.S. import tariffs for some goods produced in the Caribbean Basin. To ensure economic freedom this expansion would be undertaken by private enterprise—much of it from the United States—rather than state-controlled entities. Significantly, the promotion of export-led development strategies would also tie Central American and Caribbean countries more closely to the United States economically and politically, while increasing export earnings would enable debt-burdened countries in the region to continue payments to foreign creditors (Deere et al., 1990). In spite of the presumption that capitalist growth and democracy would automatically strengthen democracy, the United States also directly applied funds and pressure for the restoration of democracy—delineated and measured in terms of leadership elected in multiparty political contests—in countries ruled by military governments.[4]

Both U.S. policies and the discourse that explained them had a great impact on Belize during the 1980s. The government of newly independent Belize adopted the central tenets of U.S. discourse on development and democracy; however, as Belizeans sought to articulate the notions of democracy and development, they also imbued them with localized meanings.

BELIZEAN DISCOURSE ON DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Belize had been established as a British colony in territory claimed by Spain. After Central American independence, Guatemala took up the former Spanish claim. Though a Belizean nationalist movement had won the right to internal self-government in 1964, Guatemala's claim had prevented full independence. Finally, in 1981, overwhelming international support for Belizean independence pushed Britain to offer a defense guarantee, allowing it to declare its independence despite Guatemala's threat to invade (Shoman, 1992).

After attaining independence, the Belizean government continued efforts to negotiate a resolution with Guatemala, but it also redoubled efforts to retain international support for its independent status and territorial integrity.[5] The prime minister stressed this strategy in a 1985 speech (quoted in Fernandez, 1989: 91):

> We must reflect the reality of Belize in our relations with the world outside our border, consciously acknowledging that the claim of a neighbouring state to our land, a claim that made precarious the timing of our independence, is still unresolved. We must remember that we need more than ever the goodwill and the understanding of friendly nations in our search for an honorable solution to this problem that continues to threaten our viability.

The dominant role played by the United States in the hemisphere and its close relations with Guatemala made continued support from the United States particularly crucial to Belizean security after independence. In addition, the United States exercised influence over the direction of international development funds for which Belize now competed, and it was Belize's largest trading partner; by the 1980s, the United States consistently accounted for 50 percent or more of both Belizean exports and imports (CSO, 1994: 86; World Bank, 1984: 14, 77). Hence U.S. prescriptions for the region shaped emerging political-economic visions in Belize. The CBI's explicit linkage of economic development and democracy resonated with and reinforced their linkage in Belize, where the notion of democracy became central to the Belizean state's self-portrayal.

In accordance with international development discourse, Belize adopted economic growth as the measure of development, assigning top priority to the expansion of exports. In response to U.S. initiatives in the 1980s, the key role in economic expansion was assigned to the private sector, and investors were portrayed as heroes in the development process.[6] Indeed, government rhetoric equated the interests of investors with *national* interests (Medina, 1997b). At the same time, competing discourses within and outside the government attached a wider array of meanings to the notion of development, including increased access to education and health care and expanded job or small-business opportunities.

Government policies and discourse on development articulated in multiple ways with Belizean democracy discourse, which was elaborated in two directions, one directed outward to the international community, the other inward to Belizean citizens. In courting U.S. political and economic support during the 1980s, Belizean political leaders portrayed Belize as a bastion of democracy still threatened by the turmoil of its less democratic neighbors. Government officials validated Belize's democratic status by invoking its history of government by elected civilians, with two major political parties peacefully alternating in power in accordance with election results. They contrasted the peaceful stability of the Belizean political system with the strife-ridden political systems of its Central American neighbors—especially Guatemala—to define Belize as an exemplary nation; in so doing, they worked to legitimize Belizean sovereignty and attract foreign aid and investment. Belizean political leaders argued that the destiny of Belize was crucial to the United States and the West in the context of the cold war. In 1986, the Prime Minister warned that, if developing countries such as Belize fail, "The consequence will be the erosion of public confidence in our Western economic philosophy, a turning away from our traditional beliefs, and a collapse of freedom and peace. This is not a simple matter of economies, it is a battle to determine . . . [whose] philosophy will survive, that of Thomas Jefferson or that of Karl Marx" (Prime Minister Esquivel, Commencement Address, 1986, quoted in Fernandez, 1989: 100).

Indeed, during the 1980s Belizean electoral democracy was noticed and praised by the U.S. government. Following 1984 elections in Belize, the U.S. Department of State congratulated Belizeans "for their firm commitment to the democratic process. The election was conducted in the peaceful and democratic manner that has characterized Belize's electoral history. The elections in Belize serve as a further reminder of the vitality of democracy and the powerful trend toward its growth and stability that is evident in this hemisphere" (Fernandez, 1989: 75). Thus the political comportment of Belize helped to legitimate its very existence.

A second, more particularly Belizean discourse on democracy was elaborated in the domestic political arena. This localized variant defines democracy as the rule of the majority, a majority that Belizeans refer to collectively in generic terms as "the small man." Belizeans consider representative democracy a fair system because it allows the "small man" majority to shape government policies in their favor (Medina, 1990b). National leaders argue that the incorporation of "the small man" into the political process and economic development is the key to sustaining peace and democracy (speech delivered by Prime Minister George C. Price at a Citrus Growers Association meeting in 1989):

> We want to protect the little man, . . . to help him, . . . to bring him in [to the development process]. . . . That's the only way we are going to have stability in our

> country. We need to learn from the lessons around us. Why is there civil war in El Salvador? Why is there guerrilla fighting in Guatemala? Why are guerrilla insurgents beginning in Honduras? Because the little man, the majority—and the little man is the majority of the people—were neglected. . . . We are fighting for democracy.

Thus, the Belizean government's articulation of development and democracy discourses for a domestic audience revolves around the "small man," whose desire to be integrated into and to benefit from the economic development process must be accommodated to maintain his faith in the political system. This local version of democracy discourse has been invoked by each Belizean political party to legitimate its own policies and revile those of its opponent; it has been used by voters to shape government development policies.

Indeed, beginning with Belizeans' achievement of internal self-government in 1964, the proindependence party that controlled the government sought to bring the "small man" into the development process. In the 1960s the government encouraged the incorporation of smallholders into commercial sugar production alongside plantation production by the transnational Tate and Lyle (Jones, 1971). Aiming to broaden its popular support while it expanded export production, the party portrayed itself as the champion of the "small man" and his integration into the development process, laying a foundation for Belizean democracy discourse.

By independence, Belize had become almost completely dependent on sugar production for export. After independence, falling prices and the reimposition of a quota system for Caribbean sugar sold in the United States drastically cut the value of Belizean exports and plunged the economy into crisis. As Belizean trade deficits grew, the government experienced difficulties in servicing its debts in the context of rising interest rates internationally (Deere et al., 1990). When Belize sought assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), it and other lending agencies pressed the government to increase the production of exports to correct the Belizean trade deficit and enable Belize to meet its debt obligations; they also pushed the government to diversify export production away from dependence on sugar to make the Belizean economy less vulnerable to fluctuations in international sugar prices. Accordingly, the government directed increasing amounts of resources toward the expansion of citrus and banana production and export (World Bank, 1984). In the citrus industry, the Belizean government incorporated both large- and small-scale producers into expansion programs in response to small growers' public invocation of Belizean democracy discourse to demand resources for investment. In the banana industry, the U.S.-based

TABLE 1
Distribution of Citrus Acreages, 1985

Acreages	*Number of Growers*	*Percent of Growers*	*Percent of Acres*
1–5	150	44	4
6–10	92	26	6
11–20	55	15	7
21–30	18	5	4
31–40	5	1	1
41–50	5	1	2
51+	26	7	77
Total	361	100	100

Source: CGA Membership Survey, 1985.

Inter-American Foundation helped to underwrite participation by smallholders (Shaw, 1988).

ARTICULATING DEVELOPMENT WITH DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE: BELIZEAN CITRUS EXPANSION

The citrus industry, encompassing more than 600 farmers and two processing companies, produces frozen orange and grapefruit concentrates for export. In 1985, 70 percent of citrus farmers owned less than 10 acres, whereas 26 large estate owners accounted for 77 percent of Belizean citrus acreage (see Table 1). Eighty-five percent of the members of the Belize Citrus Growers Association (CGA) owned fewer than the 20 acres officially designated as an economically viable citrus farm in 1985. The small scale of the industry—and most of its citrus farms—presents problems in terms of efficiency. For example, the average yield for Belizean citrus groves ranges from 175 to 250 boxes per acre, well below the world's standard production rate of 400 boxes per acre.[8] Many smallholders experience low yields because they cannot afford to apply recommended quantities of fertilizer, though large growers who are able to apply prescribed dosages of agro-chemicals achieve yields of 350 boxes per acre (CGA, 1990: 12; World Bank, 1988: 30).

The inefficiencies of Belizean citrus production present problems when the finished product reaches international markets. Brazil accounts for nearly two-thirds of world trade in processed citrus products (FAO, 1991), whereas Belize accounts for less than 0.2 percent of world citrus production. As the world leader in frozen concentrate orange juice exports and a high-volume, low-cost producer, Brazil can set world market prices to reflect its costs. Since Belize, a higher-cost producer, is unable to affect international prices, it has depended on access to protected markets to produce and export frozen concentrate orange juice at a profit.

Prior to the 1980s, Belize sold citrus primarily in protected markets in Europe and the Caribbean.[9] Belizean access to the U.S. market was limited by high tariffs on citrus imports, which protected the U.S. domestic industry from foreign competition and raised citrus prices on the U.S. market higher than world market prices.[10] The citrus industry had not traditionally been a major foreign-exchange earner for Belize, and citrus production had actually declined during the 1970s as low prices led farmers to minimize expenses by curtailing orchard maintenance. However, as prices rose in the late 1970s, growers began to reinvest in their groves.[11] In 1979, one of the processing companies and the largest private grower together contacted the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) of the United Kingdom to request funds to rehabilitate their orchards. A CDC team dispatched to evaluate the Belizean industry recommended that citrus production be increased as rapidly as possible by giving top priority to rehabilitating neglected groves. This prioritization would have directed most of the funds toward large plantation owners. The CDC also recommended the creation of a new citrus estate, arguing that large-scale investment would increase production more rapidly and efficiently than smallholder investment (Tout et al., 1979).

In 1980, the Belizean government was asked to guarantee a loan from the CDC that made rehabilitation its top priority. When news of the proposed program was leaked to small growers, they were outraged. They convened a special meeting of the CGA at which they accused the government of favoring the large-grower minority, in contravention of the stipulation in Belizean democracy discourse that government actions should reflect the will of the majority. A resolution was passed that the loan funds be directed toward "small men" to finance *expansion* of their citrus holdings. A delegation made up of small farmers carried the resolution to the capital to confront ministers of government. Embarrassed by small growers' accusations of favoritism toward large growers, the government agreed to incorporate the CGA into negotiations with representatives from the Belizean government, the CDC, and the Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the quasi-government development bank. During negotiations that stretched over more than a year, small growers made repeated attempts to limit large growers' access to the loan funds, while the CDC opposed such exclusions, arguing that they would slow the program and jeopardize its goal of strengthening the citrus industry. Ultimately, the government resolved the conflict by siding with the majority: It agreed to guarantee the loans only on condition that expansion be given priority over rehabilitation and that funds be directed toward small growers rather than a new citrus estate, the CDC's recommendations about efficiency notwithstanding. In the process of confrontation and negotiation, each invocation of "small man" rhetoric by farmers or the government reaffirmed the crucial place of the "small man" in Belizean democracy discourse (Medina, 1990b).

However, despite the small growers' success in reshaping the loan's priorities, fruit prices were too low and interest rates too high to entice them to apply for the funds, until two dramatic changes occurred in United States frozen concentrate orange juice markets. First, a series of freezes in Florida between 1981 and 1985 transformed the United States from a net exporter of citrus products into a net importer of frozen concentrate orange juice (FAO, 1986). Brazil became the major U.S. supplier, followed by Mexico, the third-largest producer (Barham, 1992; Brown, 1987: 12). Second, the CBERA eliminated tariffs on citrus imports from Caribbean Basin countries, permitting Belize to market its frozen concentrate orange juice in the United States for just under the Brazilian price and still turn a profit. As a result, the proportion of Belizean citrus products sold in the United States jumped to 60 percent, though Belize still accounts for less than 1 percent of the frozen concentrate orange juice sold there (Barham, 1992: 845; Central Bank of Belize, 1990).

Preferential access to the U.S. market resulted in a jump in the prices offered for oranges in Belize from $6.85/box in 1982/83 to $10.75/box in 1983/84 (see Table 2).[12] The higher fruit prices stimulated investment in citrus, and growers began to apply for the CDC loan moneys to rehabilitate or expand their groves. Nearly one-quarter of the CGA's members funded expansion through the CDC loan program, and 84 percent of those participants began with less than the 20 acres defined by the Ministry of Agriculture and Industry as an economic acreage (DFC, 1989).[13] In a random sample of citrus growers I interviewed in 1989, 73 percent had expanded their citrus holdings recently, either with or without CDC loan money.[14] While smallholders enlarged their citrus holdings, large growers expanded even more rapidly, many more than doubling their acreages.[15] As a result, total citrus acreage grew from 9,000 to 25,000 in 1990; citrus production increased from 2 million boxes in 1986/87 to 3 million in 1991/92; citrus's share of national export earnings rose from 8 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 1989; and CGA membership grew from 361 in 1985 to over 600 in 1994 (Central Bank of Belize, 1991: 31; CGA, 1990: 12). In fact, by 1990, 22 percent of the workers included in random samples from the industry's unions had also begun planting citrus. The government facilitated this expansion by providing land to both large and small investors.[16]

TABLE 2
Prices Paid by Processing Companies for Oranges ($/contract box), 1976/77-1994/95

Crop Year	*Company 1*	*Company 2*
1976/77	2.37	2.54
1977/78	4.61	6.01
1978/79	5.73	5.73
1979/80	5.98	6.01
1980/81	4.40	4.81
1981/82	4.46	4.46
1982/83	6.18	6.85
1983/84	10.65	10.75
1984/85	12.22	12.22
1985/86	6.81	10.00
1986/87	11.32	12.06
1987/88	12.25	12.21
1988/89	12.35	12.35
1989/90	13.60	13.96
1990/91	10.58	10.58
1991/92	9.15	9.09
1992/93	4.22	5.02
1993/94	6.02	6.27
1994/95	8.01	8.04

Source: CGA (1993, 1991, 1981); figures supplied by companies and the CGA.
Note: A contract box is equivalent to 90 lbs. of oranges.

A second loan program, with expansion as its priority, was initiated with a 1988 World Bank offer of a US$1 million loan to develop 1,000 acres of new citrus in Belize. The World Bank's priority was further diversification of the national economy away from dependence on sugar. The Belizean government, concerned to portray itself as a champion of the "small man" rather than provoking another embarrassing confrontation with small farmers, negotiated an agreement with the World Bank that would direct the funds toward smallholders; the government proposed funding 500 acres of new citrus holdings in 20-acre blocks and 500 acres in 5-acre blocks to encourage small growers to expand up to the 20-acre level designated as economically viable (World Bank, 1988: 13). However, officials at the Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which was to administer the loan, recommended that the funds be lent to one or two large growers to expand several hundred acres each, asserting that it would be much more efficient to fund a couple of large projects that would have the same overall effect. In suggesting this they were referring to the program's impact on citrus production and export earnings rather than its possible impact on political-economic relations in southern Belize. Through several years of negotiations leading up to the program's implementation, the government, concerned with both increasing production and maintaining the political support of small growers, insisted that the program be directed toward small farmers. The final agreement allocated funds to both small and large farmers, and, again, the government made land available to both small and large growers to facilitate expansion.

The CBI and the favored access to the U.S. market that it provided had an explosive impact on Belizean citrus: Access to higher prices on the U.S. market spurred a boom in Belizean citrus production. Moreover, the CBI's linkage of democracy to development resonated with and reinforced their linkage in official Belizean discourses, which allowed smallholders to claim a role in the citrus industry's expansion. Government support for large-scale agro-export investors significantly expanded export production; support for small-scale producers achieved relatively small increases in production, but it reinforced Belizean discourse on democracy, which requires government policies to benefit the "small man" majority. Although supporting only large-scale investors would have made the drive to increase export production more efficient, the allocation of some resources to small producers allowed for the achievement of both goals established by the CBI: economic growth and stable democracy. Government provision of land and credit to small growers legitimated official development policies and gave a material reality to Belizean democracy discourse by providing material gains for "small men." Crucially, the linkage of development and democracy in Belizean government discourse and policies helped to construct and consolidate an alliance of small and large agro-export producers in support of the dominant export-led development strategy (see Medina, 1997b).

However, while government responses to the efforts of small export producers to position themselves as the "small men" of democracy discourse legitimized official definitions of democracy and development by extending a stake in the development process to *some* "small men," most Belizeans who considered themselves such were excluded. For instance, wage laborers' invocations of "small man" status have seldom won recognition or resources from the government. Instead, in efforts to suppress wages to fuel its export-led development strategy, the government has advised Belizeans to seek benefits from the economic development process by becoming small-scale investors in export agriculture rather than by seeking wage increases as workers (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Economic Development, 1985: 41; Moberg, 1992). Many have done so.[17] Further, the government has portrayed agricultural workers—the largest sector of the Belizean labor force—as migrants from neighboring Central American countries who can legitimately be excluded from Belizean development and democracy (see Medina, 1997b).

CHANGING U.S. POLICIES AND RHETORIC IN THE 1990s: FROM DEMOCRACY TO EFFICIENCY

The trade advantages that had led to the boom in Belizean citrus were soon threatened by free-trade proposals emanating from the United States. Belizean citrus growers responded by collaborating with citrus growers from Florida and other Caribbean countries to lobby the U.S. government to exclude citrus from the proposed free-trade agreements. Belizean growers argued that their country—and the citrus industry specifically—represented a CBI showcase for the combination of peaceful, stable democracy with economic growth that the United States could not afford to lose. They cautioned that free-trade agreements would threaten the exemplary relationship between development and democracy in Belize. The chairman of the CGA warned U.S. and Belizean officials, " 'Very few of us could make the infrastructural changes necessary to compete with [the economies of] First World countries' " (*Amandala*, July 5, 1991), suggesting that direct competition with Brazil would drive many Belizean citrus producers—especially smallholders—out of business. What Belize and other small, underdeveloped countries needed, Belizean citrus officials argued, was "*fair* trade, not *free* trade": "Free trade will place the large developed citrus industries of Mexico and Brazil 'on the same starting block with the small, underdeveloped citrus industries of Belize and the other CBI countries.' On the other hand . . . fair trade will allow special and useful provisions for small underdeveloped citrus industries like Belize's" (*Amandala*, April 19, 1991).

To the dismay of Belizean citrus producers, the U.S. ambassador to Belize responded to their arguments by distancing current U.S. policies from discourses associated with the CBI. He asserted, "All rhetorical flourishes aside, free trade is the fairest form of trade" (*Amandala*, April 26, 1991). Reinterpreting the CBI's goals from the perspective of the 1990s, he explained that the initiative had been designed to afford small countries in the Caribbean Basin an opportunity to "capitalize on their economic strengths and time to address their weaknesses." "However," he asserted, "the CBI's long-term objective has always been to help industries in these countries to become more efficient and competitive in the world market"(*Amandala*, April 26, 1991).

The U.S. ambassador's reply demonstrates the shift in U.S. priorities and policy emphases from the 1980s to the 1990s. At the beginning of the 1980s, insurgent movements perceived by the Reagan administration as instances of Soviet aggression were gaining ground in several countries of the Caribbean Basin. The U.S. response promoted and linked capitalist economic growth with democracy and free and fair elections. By the end of the 1980s, the Soviet Union had dissolved, with most of its former constituent states embracing capitalism and some form of multiparty politics; in Latin America as well, the 1980s had seen the spread of formal democracy, in which military rulers were replaced by civilian leaders elected in multiparty political contests. With the communist challenge to its dominance in the hemisphere vanquished, the U.S. government was able to shift its rhetoric and policies to the aggressive pursuit of increased opportunities for investment and trade for U.S. business. Though still within the political repertoire of liberalism, U.S. neoliberal discourse in the 1990s foregrounded the coupling of economic growth with efficiency and free and fair trade, while the link posited between capitalist economic growth and democracy in the form of free and fair elections receded into the background.[18]

This shift in U.S. policies and discourse poses a dilemma for Belize. Its citrus boom was spurred by changes in U.S. trade policies under the CBI, but recent alterations in U.S. policies and discourse threaten the industry's viability. Even after expansion, the Belizean citrus industry is small, most citrus growers are smallholders, and average yields in Belizean groves are below world averages. However, though Belizean smallholder production may be considered inefficient, smallholder citrus planting has raised income levels for many in the citrus belt of underdeveloped southern Belize while providing an avenue for upward mobility out of the working class for wage laborers seeking higher incomes. The Belizean government encouraged Belizeans to participate in the development process through investment in citrus and recognized small growers as the "small men" of the democracy discourse, incorporating them into an alliance with large growers that has underwritten both export-led economic growth and stable democracy. In so doing, the government weighed perceived trade-offs between politically expedient policies that support the democracy discourse and economically expedient policies that aim to maximize the efficiency of export production. It sacrificed some economic efficiency to maximize the political support of small growers, strengthen the legitimacy of Belizean democracy, and forge a social alliance in support of export-led development.

PROSPECTS: THE POLITICS OF EFFICIENCY

President Clinton has called for free trade throughout the Americas by the year 2005. Meanwhile, the protected access to U.S. markets afforded to Caribbean countries under the CBI has already been eroded by the inclusion of citrus in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) despite combined Floridian and Caribbean lobbying efforts.[19] Worse, even while Belize still enjoys protected trade status vis-à-vis Brazil in United States, European, and Caribbean markets, prices for citrus in Belize have fallen drastically because of increases in Brazilian production. The 1992/93 world orange crop set a record, and the quantity of citrus processed increased 23 percent; however, demand for processed citrus grew only 2 percent (FAO, 1994: 142-144). As a result, world market prices for frozen concentrate orange juice plummeted, and the prices that Belizean citrus growers received were halved: While implementation of the CBI had increased citrus prices from $6.85 to $10.75/box, in 1992/93 prices fell to $4.22/box (see Table 2). The Belizean government made interest-free loans available to farmers during the 1992/93 crop season to encourage them to continue applying chemicals to their groves. However, many small growers, skeptical that they would earn enough on the harvest to cover the costs of chemicals in addition to their other farm and household expenses, curtailed their use of inputs, reducing the size of their crops. Many had to reschedule their payments on the loans that had financed their expansion. A small number of growers have sold their farms, and there is widespread concern in the industry that many more may lose their farms or decide to sell them, unable to make loan payments or turn a profit at current prices. International agencies have stopped funding agro-export expansion in Belize.

Prices that Belizean growers receive would drop even further under hemisphere wide free trade, which would force Belizean citrus producers to compete directly with Brazil. In a free-trade future, could Belizeans continue to produce and sell frozen concentrate orange juice profitably? What price might a small producer like Belize pay if forced to compete in an open market with much larger producers? Some Belizean citrus farmers argue that the recent drastic drop in fruit prices has begun a process of consolidation of citrus holdings in the hands of the largest estate owners, who can increase their efficiency more easily than smallholders. Whereas the Belizean government defined 20 acres as an economic acreage in 1990, CGA officials estimate that an economic acreage would now have to be well over 50 acres. Further steep declines in fruit prices resulting from the elimination of current trade privileges would almost certainly accelerate the process of consolidation if not the collapse of the industry.

A parallel process is beginning in the Belizean banana industry. The European Union (EU) had extended preferences for bananas from African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, in part to support small Caribbean countries that depend heavily on banana exports and are seen as being unable to compete directly with lower-cost, high-volume producers in Latin America. These preferences had revitalized the Belizean banana industry. However, the United States filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the behest of the banana giant Chiquita, charging that EU policy is unfair to Latin American banana producers. The WTO recently issued a preliminary ruling in support of the U.S. position, which would curtail the Caribbean's preferential access to European markets. The chairman of the Belize Banana Growers Association responded with the charge that "'the Belize banana industry has been sentenced to death by the United States'" (*Amandala*, May 18, 1997). Though the banana industry in Belize incorporates relatively few smallholders in comparison with citrus, a consolidation of holdings has also begun in that industry, with some plantation owners buying out smaller producers to increase economies of scale. At the same time, jobs are being eliminated, and the workers who remain will be pushed to become more productive (*Amandala*, May 18, 1997). Thus both agro-export industries that were expanded during the 1980s—with the aim of diversifying the Belizean economy to make it less vulnerable to market shocks and in response to the advice of international lending agencies and the provision of protected trade arrangements—are threatened by free trade. They must become more efficient or risk collapse.

Efforts to increase the efficiency of agro-export production in Belize would unravel the alliance between small and large export producers that has underwritten the implementation of an export-led development strategy in Belize; it would precipitate a "representational crisis" (Jessop, 1978: 38) in which dominant political discourses are no longer effective. The government has had success in the past in establishing economic growth through the expansion of exports as an overriding national interest, in part because it incorporated smallholders into the expansion process; in accordance with intertwined development and democracy discourses, the government did offer a stake in development to *some* (though not most) "small men." The elimination of many small agro-export producers would remove the stake of the "small man" in the export-led development strategy and make democracy as the rule of the majority less compatible with the definition of development as export expansion. If small citrus growers are transformed into wage laborers and workers no longer see citrus production as a ladder out of the working class into higher standards of living, class relations in southern Belize are likely to become increasingly polarized and conflictual, especially if the government and investors attempt to depress wages further as a way of increasing efficiency. The U.S. ambassador may have been correct when he suggested that Belizean industry would become more efficient in response to expanding free trade (*Amandala*, April 26, 1991), but this offers little encouragement to many Belizeans.

If the alliance that has held sway for several decades disintegrates under the pressure of free trade, struggle will ensue among social groups competing to articulate new discourses that can mobilize social alliances in support of or resistance to a new politics of efficiency. Large-scale export producers, who may hope to survive by increasing the efficiency of their operations, will find allies in international development and credit institutions. Belizean politicians under pressure from these same external quarters may also become allies, though the legitimization of government support for the project of efficiency will likely require politicians to disconnect democracy from development or to shift democracy discourse away from its current concern with the "small man." However, to win support from those who constitute the majority of Belizean society, dominant groups must offer them some stake in their plans for the future and then make good—at least partially—on that offer (Scott, 1985). What stake would most Belizeans find in development defined as the efficient expansion of exports? Would the promise of national development be sufficient, given the different effects efficiency would have on different segments of the Belizean nation?

If they are not offered a clear stake in a reorganized development process, the expanding ranks of working-class or unemployed Belizeans are likely to resist moves toward efficiency. They may reiterate the discourses that legitimated development policies in the 1980s by insisting on incorporation of the "small man," or they may attempt to redefine the notions of democracy and development. Development is already a polyvalent term, defined by many Belizeans more broadly than economic growth, and a local nongovernmental organization has already launched nationwide discussions aimed at redefining democracy in terms of greater participation by civil society in policymaking.[20]

The uncertainties that Belizeans confront are widely shared throughout the Caribbean, where the majority of countries produce a rather narrow range of commodities at relatively small scales and depend heavily on more developed countries both as suppliers of imports and as markets for their exports. Industries that flourished under CBI provisions, principally garment assembly and fruit and vegetable production including citrus, are now threatened by free-trade expansion; some have already lost ground. Citrus producers in Jamaica and Trinidad face the same pressures as their Belizean counterparts, while garment manufacture, the industry that expanded most under the influence of CBI, has already lost investment to Mexico since the implementation of NAFTA (Watson, 1994b: 83).[21] The erosion of trade privileges in the EU by the recent WTO ruling on bananas also has implications for Caribbean nations other than Belize. Many Caribbean banana industries consist of smallholder producers who own between 0.5 and 40 hectares (Harker, 1995). Whereas the Caribbean industries are less efficient producers than the high-volume corporate plantations of the Latin American mainland, they account for over 50 percent of the Windward Islands' export earnings (Harker, 1995). Caribbean banana farmers have worked to win international support for continuing their EU trade privileges, echoing Belizean citrus farmers' defense of their own trade privileges: " 'We have avoided the strife and turmoil that has plagued Latin America precisely because we don't have a plantation economy and our distribution of income is better,' " the chairman of the St. Lucia Banana Growers Association recently asserted (Rohter, 1997). His assertion suggests that the mutual causality between democracy and capitalist development posed by CBI discourse resonated widely in the Caribbean region. However, throughout the region, this logic and the social configurations that it helped to shape are confronted by the competing logic of efficiency and its aim to reconfigure Caribbean societies. International support leans decidedly toward the latter.

Efforts to transform Caribbean societies to confront the transition from protected to free-trade regimes will have differential impacts on Caribbean populations by class and economic sector and in many cases likely by gender and race as well. These differential impacts will give rise to what Bryan calls "challenges to governance" that Caribbean states will have to confront and "manage"(Bryan, 1995b).[22] Whereas the ability of disparate social groups to mobilize material resources will play a significant role in shaping the outcome of such challenges and attempts to manage them, these struggles will also be fought on the terrain of discourse, where competing groups will deploy alternative definitions and evaluations of notions such as democracy and efficiency to mobilize social alliances that can shape the meaning of development.[23]

NOTES

1. Having disavowed socialism after a leadership change, Jamaica was included in the CBI. Cuba, Grenada, Nicaragua, and Guyana were initially excluded from the CBI, although Grenada

and Guyana were admitted after Guyana shifted away from socialism and the United States invaded Grenada.

2. Reagan established the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America in July 1983, after he had announced plans for a Caribbean Basin Initiative and while Congress was debating its content. The commission was charged with studying "the nature of United States interests in the Central American region and the threats now posed to those interests" and providing advice to U.S. policymakers (NBCCA, 1984).

3. According to this discourse, totalitarianism could only exist in tandem with communism; dictators and single-party states that practiced capitalism were merely "authoritarian."

4. CBI policies and rhetoric were accompanied by U.S. military action, including the invasion of Grenada, funding of the Contras in Nicaragua, and assistance to Salvadoran and Guatemalan militaries.

5. The conflict with Guatemala remains unresolved.

6. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) demanded the privatization of government-owned industries and a reduction of government involvement in purchasing and distribution of domestic foods as a condition for Belizean receipt of loans. It supported private-sector investment and entrepreneurship by funding the Belize Export and Investment Promotion Unit and the Belize Institute of Management (Barry, 1992: 155-158).

7. Belizean politicians clarify in public speeches that the "small man" category includes both men and women. Both major Belizean political parties have adopted this rhetoric.

8. One box (contract box) equals 90 lb. of oranges or 80 lb. of grapefruit.

9. CARICOM nations maintain a 40 percent tariff on non-CARICOM citrus products.

10. The tariff amounts to 40 percent of Florida citrus production costs, on average (Barham, 1992: 845).

11. The price increase was largely due to political mobilization by citrus growers to negotiate higher prices from the processing companies (Medina, 1990a).

12. Prices are given in Belizean dollars; BZ$1 = US$0.50.

13. Forty-five percent of the participants began with 5 acres or less and expanded an average of 3 acres; 31.5 percent began with 6 to 10 acres and expanded an average of 8 acres; and 7.1 percent began with 11 to 20 acres and expanded an average of 11 acres (DFC, 1989).

14. The sample included 30 randomly selected members of the Citrus Growers Association, from its 1989 membership of 398 farmers (see Medina, 1992).

15. Limitations on large growers' access to CDC funds were eroded to disburse the funds more quickly than small growers were able to absorb them. Several also sought alternative sources of funding for expansion.

16. The government owns over 50 percent of the land in Belize (Barry, 1992: 132). It has made land available to both small and large growers on a lease basis. After "developing" the land, farmers can apply to purchase their parcels for below-market rates.

17. The average income among workers in Belize in the mid-1980s was approximately $6,000 (CSO, 1984), and in 1986 each acre of citrus could produce $1,000-$1,500 of net income. Thus, a worker with 4-6 acres of citrus could double his or her income.

18. The notable exception has been Haiti, and Belize was quick to send troops to assist U.S. efforts to "restore democracy."

19. However, in response to the citrus lobbies, negotiators agreed to phase out U.S. citrus tariffs gradually over a 15-year period.

20. However, the working class is not a homogeneous, unified entity. Racial-ethnic and national distinctions create fault lines. In spite of a 20 percent unemployment rate in Belize, immigrant labor from neighboring Central American countries has been widely used, exacerbating tensions between Belizeans and immigrants and among competing racial-ethnic groups in

Belize. Most immigrant laborers employed in Belize are classified into the “Spanish” racial-ethnic category, their presence exacerbating tensions between Spanish-Belizeans and Afro-Belizean Creoles and Garifuna. Pressure to lower wages further could lead to increasing employment of immigrant workers, which would likely further increase ethnic and national tensions. These tensions are addressed more fully in Medina (1997a; 1997b).

21. Garments were not included in the CBERA, but in 1987 section 807 of the tariff code extended privileged access to the U.S. market to garments sewn in the Caribbean from 100 percent U.S.-cut and -formed parts (Watson, 1994).

22. At the same time, Munroe points out that the neoliberal reforms that paved the way for the free-trade project have already eroded the state’s capacity to manage discontent through social spending, either to subsidize smallholder export producers or to meet the demands of working-class or unemployed citizens. Munroe concludes that this has already undermined democracy in the Caribbean, which is “in malaise and very probably in a state of decay” (1996: 106).

23. The elaboration of alternative visions of democracy and development is a strategy with many precedents in the Caribbean and one that has had varying results. For example, see Dupuy (1994) on Haiti’s Lavalas movement.

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