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UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION
Vienna International Centre, P.O. Box 300, 1400 Vienna, Austria
Tel: (+43-1) 26026-0 · www.unido.org · unido@unido.org

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THE JOINERY AND FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN ANTIGUA 1/

by

Donald P. Christian*

* General Manager, Christian Enterprises, St. John's, Antigua

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The furniture and joinery industry in Antigua is relatively old and until about [illegible] years ago [illegible] was done by hand. There was no mechanization or technical assistance but during this period, there was an abundance of very [illegible] or [illegible] artisans.

After World War II, [illegible] started, though relatively small, embarked on a programme of mechanization. The industry, however, at this moment is still not fully mechanized and nothing is mass produced even though we have some very well equipped factories.

The industry in my country has far to go and at this time is suffering from a shortage of skilled craftsmen most of whom have migrated to Britain and the United States of America. In order to supplement this shortage of craftsmen, the Government with the assistance of the United Kingdom Government has built a Technical College which is intended to fill the gap caused by the exodus of craftsmen and artisans. Lack of trained personnel is the main reason for the college not playing its full role and to this end I feel the United Nations Development Organization can assist.

There are currently about 10 establishments producing furniture and joinery. These range from 2,000 to 14,000 sq. ft. plants, most of which are proprietorships and not corporations. Of the 10 only 2 are engaged in specialized work, the others are what we term as "jobbers". This, however, is due to the lack of finance and technical know how. This we hope will be overcome in the not too distant future because of the newly established Carribean Development Bank which was organized and designed to foster both large and small industry throughout the Carribean.

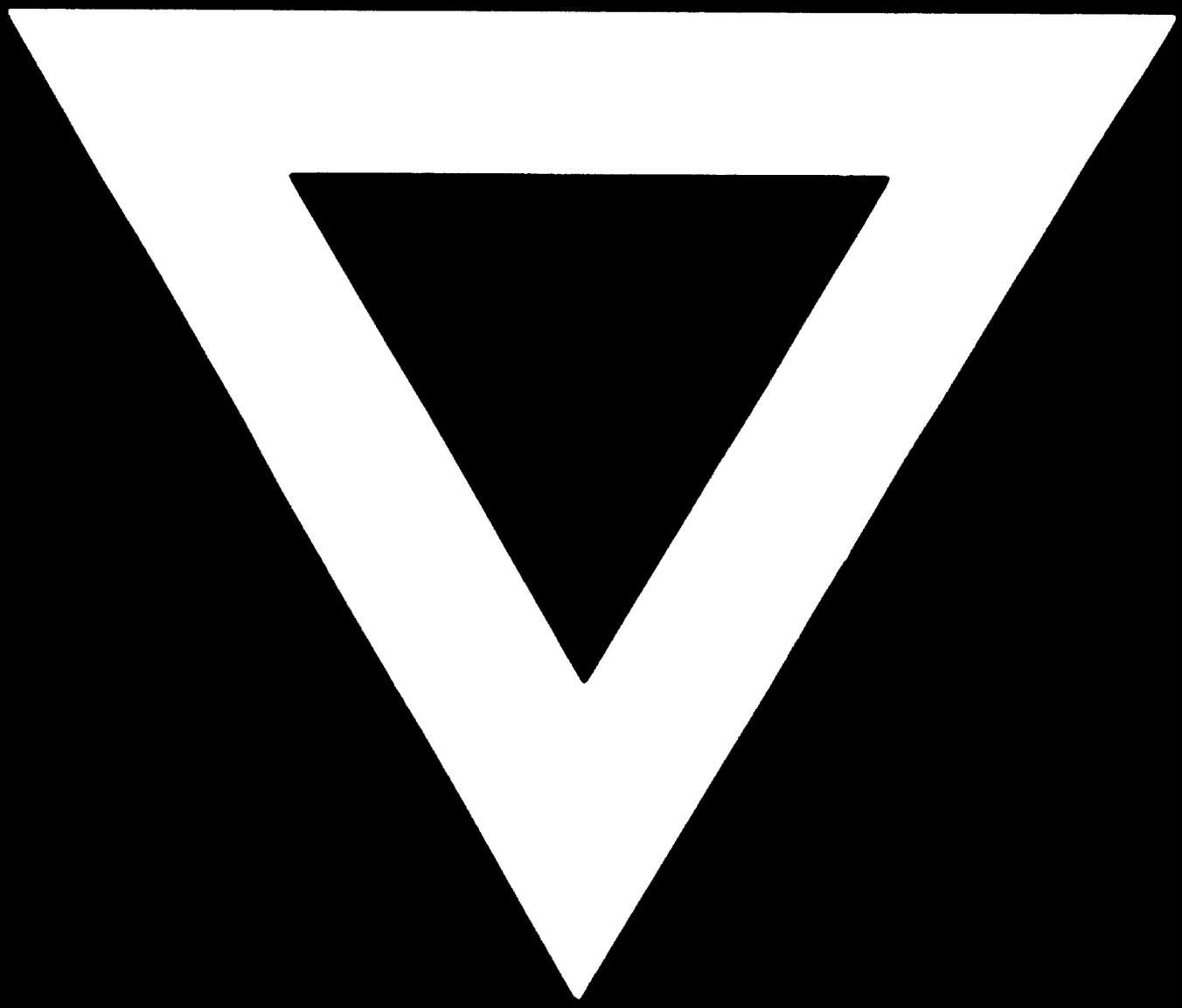
The Antigua Government has also established an agency - The Antigua and Barbuda Development Bank and funds from the Carribean Development Bank is channelled along with local funds to help organize these as well as other industries.

Popular opinion is that for these industries to survive they need a great deal of encouragement by way of management assistance, re-organization of the plants and technical assistance in their operation.

The industry at the moment can supply 60% of the local needs but in order for it to play its full role not only in Antigua but throughout the Caricom Area, there is the urgent need for the re-organization of the entire industry in a more specialized manner. However, this may be very difficult in a small community such as ours because of the limited training we have had, this mutilates against a professional business outlook. militates

To this end I feel that the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation can fulfill a role in co-ordinating with the Local Government Agencies in organizing local training programmes for craftsmen and management in the fields of joinery, furniture and other allied departments.

Our people respond very quickly to training and if it is the policy and objective of the Technical Division of the United Nations to organise or assist such training programmes locally, I do believe that they will find the participants very interested, co-operative and willing to learn.



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