

From South India

The Agricultural Situation

THERE has been a heavy pressure of population on land in recent years. While, the population increased, the number of industrial workers declined and the ranks of agriculturists swelled. This happened throughout the last century. Between 1875 and 1941 alone, for instance, the decline in industrial employment had been of the order of 3 millions, in spite of the growth of large-scale industries, while population had increased by 130 millions. The results of this unhealthy tendency have manifested themselves in various ways, such as lower agricultural efficiency and the creation of uneconomic holdings on a large-scale. This is the fundamental defect of Indian agriculture today, said Sir Manilal Nanavati in the course of his address to the All-India Agricultural Economic Conference held at Madras last week.

Though paucity of reliable data has concealed the magnitude of this evil, it is wide-spread and is at the root of all our agrarian troubles. While the lot of those cultivating these uneconomic holdings numbering about 11.5 lakhs, is unsatisfactory, the position of the share-croppers cultivating such holdings is even worse, as they have to para with half the crop generally as the landholders' share. Neither of these types of agriculturists possess at present the necessary equipment to get the maximum from their plots of land.

To remedy this fundamental defect in the structure of our agriculture, several suggestions were put forward by various speakers at the conference. Sir Manilal Nanavati took up the standpoint that the owners of uneconomic holdings and landless agriculturists of all sorts, such as e.g. tenants, share-croppers, and labourers should be rehabilitated immediately, and that the immediate problem was to settle tenants on lands belonging to non-agriculturists. Tenants-cum-labourers

should be taken off the land altogether as then alone could sufficient land be ensured for constituting economic holdings for tenants and owner-cum-tenants. Wherever the area under cultivation is found inadequate for rehabilitating these classes, a concentrated drive must be made for the reclamation of land with a view to setting up new settlements. Legislation for the controlled use of land and providing for the regulation of land values and sales was an imperative necessity which should precede all efforts at establishing peasant proprietary farms in India.

Referring to agrarian policy, Sir Nanavati said that all agricultural land should be declared State property; intermediate interests in land should be eliminat-

ed; and all land should be given away to cultivators with occupancy rights and with restrictions on their right to transfer and subdivide holdings. Share-cropping should be abolished and replaced by low cash rentals based on a certain multiple of Government assessment, and correlated with the price level.

The merits of this solution, however, were seriously questioned at a meeting held this week at the South Indian Journalists' Federation where the chairman pointed out that if lands were merely given away to the actual tillers of the soil, it would not solve the problem of increasing production. The mere wiping out of absentee landlordism was not a satisfactory solution, since even today a large percentage of such people took an active interest in improving their lands and their elimination will only result in one set of people being replaced by another, without the nation standing to benefit from the change.

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Will supply a factual and statistical analysis of the economic situation in India and abroad. The Hon'ble Mr. K. C. Neogy, Minister of Commerce, has kindly consented to write on some Aspects of Our Foreign Trade Policy. Acharya Kripalani will present the case for Gandhian Economics. Acharya Narendra Dev will write on the Socialist Point of view, while Prof. D. Ghosh, Head of the Department of Economics in the University of Calcutta, will give the Economist's Prescription. Specific problems such as Devaluation and Its Aftermath, Production Trend and Behaviour of Prices, etc., will be covered by competent economists and statisticians who have specialised in the study of these problems. Some of the special features will be an exhaustive study of our industries, with particular reference to the dollar earners, new industrial undertakings under way and in the blue print stage

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The problem, in his view, could be solved by making short-term adjustments during the period of transition from a feudal to a modern and progressive community

Several speakers at the Agricultural Conference emphasised that the approach of the Government to the problem of enhancing food production was fundamentally wrong since it did not get at the actual tiller of the soil. Undoubtedly, if Government cannot effectively reach the 40 million farmers and if farmers themselves do not feel the national call to produce more foodstuff and do not secure from Government their essential needs, all efforts to Grow-More-Food will be sheer waste. What the cultivator needs today is good seeds, manure and agricultural implements. The Government have now no separate machinery to see that the ryot gets these to increase his production though there are hundreds of officials tied down to their offices and their files. In this respect, there is also no co-ordination between the Central and the Provincial Governments. The editor *Rural India*, Mr. H. S. Puranik, suggested as solution the establishment of an All-India Peoples' Food Production Council, in which only cultivators who are really interested in increasing food production should be included, to work out practical schemes. Prof. A. W. Ashby of Oxford, speaking at the Journalists' Conference this week, also struck a somewhat similar note. He felt that if it were possible to build up confidence between the cultivators on the one side and those engaged in agricultural research, education and administration on the other, it would be possible to achieve a reasonable rate of progress technical and economic, in Indian agriculture.

One way of establishing direct contact between the official classes and the agricultural community is by the formation of non-official organisations. In this regard it is gratifying to note that the Government of Madras are giving a lead. They are now thinking of setting up non-official committees consisting of cultivating ryots, and

have under their consideration a scheme by which rural credit societies could be utilised for inducing cultivators to put forth greater efforts in the field of food production. These rural credit societies could also be developed into multi-purpose societies, in which case they could greatly help the ryots in all directions.

There is much truth, no doubt, in what Mr. Ashby told the Agricultural Conference, viz, that agricultural units in India should be re-organised, in order to increase the physical productivity of farming. There is, in his opinion, scope for such increase to the ex-

tent of 25 to 30 per cent. To achieve this, he added, not only capital was necessary, but the agriculturists should be helped with material resources for improving production. The system of agricultural education should be vastly extended. More agricultural schools of the intermediate type should be opened and the size of agricultural holdings should be increased. As there was no 'public relief system in India as in other countries, short-term loans should be given by banks to cultivators to improve agriculture and long-term measures should be sponsored by Government.

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