

gadgets for decortication. Regulated markets and grading have also been on the cards, but progress, as usual, has been slow.

Among the schemes proposed by the Committee are the establishment of Arecanut Research Stations and Nurseries and a Central Technological Laboratory, subsidy for wells to provide irrigation facilities, construction of warehouses and grants to co-operative societies, universities and research institutes for advanced studies on arecanuts and extension of cultivation to Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

A survey recently conducted shows that a lakh acres can be brought under cultivation in addition to the 2.62 lakh acres that are not estimated to be under betelnuts. But in view of the high cost of production, greater attention has to be directed towards judicious, cultural and manurial practices, utilisation of by-products, progressive research and a more vigorous application of the fruits of research. As the question of research is of special importance, the proposal for setting up a Central Research Station, which has been kept in cold storage for long, should now be taken up. But unless the Committee succeeds in persuading the States concerned to collect acreage and production statistics, it may be difficult for it to draw up and implement development plans.

Nibbling at the Land Problem

THE land problem is being nibbled at by some and sniffed at by others, but none of the States has yet mustered courage to face it squarely and launch a frontal attack on it. Its very complexity, which has been the professed reason for the delay in coming to grips with it, is increasingly becoming clear, rules out any but the straightforward and simple solution. For the primary object of redistribution or tenancy reform or whatever one may choose to call it, is to settle as many people on land as can be accommodated, subject to the condition that those who are settled should be able to make a living from agriculture, and be in a position to improve cultivation. Why not, then, set about it straightaway by appointing land commissions to carry it out and leaving it to them to decide what should be the size of the unit, and the ceiling for holdings?

Now quality of land differs from place to place, if not from plot to plot; forms and conditions of

tenancy differ in like manner, so do those of cultivation. How could it then be thought possible that the States should each be able to determine what should be the ceiling for holdings and the size of the economic holding for the land within their respective jurisdictions? And yet, it is precisely on the ground that each State should find out its own norm for these things that action is being delayed, and everything has been held up pending the census of land holdings in each of the States.

The States are not only shy of fixing a ceiling, they would not even agree to set a dead-line for the census on land holdings which the Centre requested them to carry out in January last. Today the representatives of the States are meeting at a conference in Delhi to discuss the matter with the Central Government, "to seek clarifications, as also to explain their technical, administrative and financial difficulties." The Centre keeps on urging them to complete the census as quickly as possible so that a land polity may be formulated, but in the spirit of the Bhagavat Gita, not hoping for the fruits of action. The States which have agreed to take up or have taken up the census are Bombay, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Andhra, Hyderabad, Kutch, Vindhya Pradesh, Bhopal and Coorg, the expected date of completion extending from the next month to September next year. Madhya Bharat, Mysore, Saurashtra and Ajmer have not yet fixed any time schedule, while Delhi, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh have flatly declined to make any commitment at all, "for administrative reasons." Travancore-Cochin will not have the census because it does not think that the census will serve any useful purpose. Bihar and West Bengal have agreed to hold a sample survey, but the former has not yet framed a scheme for it. Rajasthan has not yet set up a revenue agency, nor has it completed a settlement survey; hence it may not be able to undertake the census. The picture that emerges is neither of co-ordinated nor of speedy action.

Meanwhile, legislation has been proceeding piecemeal and every week something or other is reported which smacks of nibbling or merely sniffing at the problem. This week, for instance, the Planning Commission is reported to have expressed its dissatisfaction with what the West Bengal Government has done,

or rather proposes to do, under the Zamindari Abolition Act passed by it and one of the advisers to the Planning Commission, it is further reported, is being sent out to look specifically into the position of sharecroppers with a view to ensuring them the rights of permanent tenancy. Also this week comes the news of Andhra exempting small holders now paying a land revenue of Rs 10 or less from any payment at all, while a bill, now before the Legislature, proposes the levy of a surcharge on others, to toe the line laid down by the Planning Commission of raising more revenue to pay for planned development. A third item is from Hyderabad, reporting the progress made by the Land Commission towards working out a formula for the conversion of different types of land on the lines of the standard acre adopted in East Punjab for the rehabilitation of refugees who had to be quickly settled on the land left vacant by those who had migrated to West Punjab.

What does all this add up to? Preparing, for a journey which none of the States seems to be willing to undertake yet. Certainly they are in no hurry. It is more than seven years now that the present Government has been in power. The problem has been discussed *ad nauseam*. Perhaps the time has come to realise that no satisfactory settlement is ever likely to be reached along the present lines of elaborate and long-drawn enquiries, at the end of which the self-same problems will have to be faced, which can be faced and should be faced here and now, *viz*, settling as many people as can be conveniently settled on the land that is available, subject to the test of their being able to make a living and carrying on cultivation with the minimum standard of efficiency. It is high time now to think of the second part of the proposition, for without adequate resources and organisation, mere redistribution of land will avail nothing.

Trade with China

THE deal negotiated by the Indian Tobacco Delegation to China for the export of tobacco against import of silk of equivalent value has now been officially publicised as a trade agreement concluded "in pursuance of the earlier one". This is rather puzzling, unless all that is meant is that payment arrangements for the tobacco—silk deal, which had been finalised much earlier, will be according to