

work out a common policy on agriculture for the entire area. In making this concession the British Government should have been able to allay a larger measure of suspicion nursed against them by other countries. However, politics apart, this concession may ultimately prove advantageous even to the British economy in more than one way. Stoppage of agricultural subsidies should help relieve pressure on the Government resources and the release of labour from agriculture might help in holding down the wage demand. As for the balance of payments, it is conceivable that after the economy has adjusted itself to the change in the present pattern of resource allocation consequent on the withdrawal of subsidies to agriculture, the impact in this case as well of the above concession would be favourable.

Decentralisation in Development

THE idea of associating people directly with the development tasks of manageable units of territory, so that progress follows closely the line of local needs and enough popular enthusiasm is released, has been receiving attention for some years now. The intention was to bring the panchayats, primary organs of local self-government, into the picture by delegating enough power and allocating adequate resources to them; but how this was to be done was not clear. A team, headed by Shri Baivantrai Mehta has, after conducting a field study of the Community Development programme on behalf of the Planning Commission's Committee on Plan Projects, made certain recommendations which deserve thought. The team has suggested the creation of a new tier of local bodies, above the Panchayats and below the district organisations, for undertaking the work of development. Each of these new bodies, tentatively designated as Panchayat Samitis, is designed to cover the area of a Development Block; and it is to take charge of all aspects of development work in rural areas.

The Panchayat Samiti is to be set up by statute; and it is to come into being through indirect election from village panchayats. The team's preference for a new agency of development between the panchayats and district bodies is understandable. While the former are too small and too ill-equipped ad-

ministratively and financially to take up development work on an adequate scale, the latter are somewhat too unwieldy. Again, the area of a panchayat is too restricted to permit of development work, which at times may have to be visualised on a scale big enough to meet the overall needs of a whole group of panchayats, involving problems of effective co-ordination and economical use of resources. On the other hand, the territory of a district is apt to be too scattered and too far-flung, rendering concentrated attention and devotion on the part both of the authorities and the people rather difficult. Local development calls for the stimulation of local initiative and zeal which is possible only in an area which is not too large to dissipate interest or energy nor too cramped to militate against a well-thought-out and harmonised plan for development for clusters of villages with common needs and problems.

Compact Agency

THE proposed Panchayat Samiti is evidently meant to be a compact, workmanlike agency: "We consider that the time has now arrived to establish a single representative and vigorous democratic institution to take charge of all aspects of development work in the rural areas. It must not be cramped by too much control by Government or Government agencies." What is more, 'it must have the power to make mistakes and to learn by making mistakes, but it must also receive guidance which will help it to avoid making mistakes.' The trend towards decentralisation has so far been hindered by an excessive concern for rectitude on the part of Authority and also a certain attitude of reserve, if not of doubt and suspicion too, in regard to the capacity of newly-established self governing units to manage their affairs on proper lines.

There is no doubt some justification for this attitude; for, where people comparatively new to tasks of self-management and businesslike administration are concerned, there is bound to be a tendency to go wrong, seek short cuts to action or overlook minor rules and regulations. But if such a tendency arises from excessive eagerness and enthusiasm rather than from indifference and lethargy, there is good reason to be tolerant. After all, what matters is the amount of work turned

out and the degree of progress achieved, and not the act of conforming most punctiliously to the mere formulae or formalities of functioning, which may often be at the cost of real progress. It is like sacrificing expression at the altar of grammar.

That the possibility of error has been robustly recognised and the right to commit such error and learn from it in the course of progress has been amply granted, is a happy sign. Equally heartening is the realisation that the executive machinery, far from seeking to control the new units of self-government proposed, ought to be 'controlled and directed' by popular representatives of the area concerned. The principle of self-exertion and self-help through self-managed units would otherwise defeat itself; and indeed, there would be no need at all for going in for the luxury of a new set of agencies for local development. For good or bad, the work could well be left to proceed on the present lines, with a vast array of authorities laying down the law and the people trying half-heartedly to follow it.

Another wholesome recommendation of the Balvantrai team is in regard to the need for allotting to the proposed new agencies adequate sources of finance, without which they would soon sink to frustration and invite ridicule, as has happened in the case of a large variety of local bodies. These have ceased to be even effective show-pieces through prolonged self-stultification. The team's lukewarmness to district boards, school boards and the like, meant to serve whole districts and reduced in the process to the misfortune of being neither here nor there, need not cause surprise. Their jurisdictions have been too large and their resources too crippled to cope with the ambitious tasks set for them. With the establishment of Panchayat Samities, covering manageable areas, district bodies might well go or they could usefully be replaced by some other agencies for ensuring co-ordination among the Panchayat Samities in a district. The team has suggested the setting up of Zilla Parishads for the purpose, to be composed of the presidents of Panchayat Samities, all MLAs and MPs of the district and district-level officers of various categories, concerned with development.