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PROF. JOHN D. BLACK
(1883-1960)

Dr. John D. Black, Henry Lee Professor Emeritus of Harvard University, died on April 12, 1960 following a heart attack in January last. In him the world has lost one of the most distinguished contributors to the science of agricultural economics and India a great well-wisher.

As one of his colleagues has truly observed: "For a good many decades to come, and probably as long as agricultural economics is taught with a decent attention to its origin, students will be hearing the name of John D. Black."

Dr. Black was born in Cambridge, Wisconsin, on June 6, 1883. He obtained his education at Oshkosh Normal School and the University of Wisconsin. His earlier interest was in the field of literature and the first five years of his career were spent as a teacher of English first at the Western Reserve University and later at the Michigan College of Mines.

He turned his attention to agricultural economics in 1916 and obtained his Ph. D. Degree in the subject in 1919. From 1918 to 1927 he taught agricultural economics at the University of Minnesota. In 1926 he published his path-breaking work "Introduction to Production Economics." This was soon followed by his appointment as Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Harvard in 1927 where he remained for the rest of his life. His major publications included "Agricultural Reform in the United States," 1929; "Farm Management" (with Clawson, Sayre and Wilcox), 1947; "Future Food and Agriculture Policy" (with Kiefer), 1948; "The Rural Economy of New England", 1951; "Introduction to Economics for Agriculture", 1953; "Research, Teaching & Public Administration of the Economics of Agriculture for India," (with Stewart,) 1954 and Rural Planning of one County: Worcester County, Massachusetts (with Westcott), 1959.

Dr. Black has perhaps contributed more original ideas in the field of agricultural economics than any of his contemporaries. He was essentially a pioneer and he usually left the new fields that he took delight in opening up to be developed further by others and preferred to turn his attention to other new fields.

Although Dr. Black was one of the most distinguished research workers of his time, his main interest lay in teaching. He was a teacher first and last. It is doubtful if any other colleague of his has so many devoted disciples as Dr. Black had. Even the dullest student in his class received his constant care and attention and he continued his interest in his students even after they had long left the University.

To-day a number of important policy makers and administrators in his own country in the field of agricultural economics are his former students or colleagues. He influenced Government policy not only by his teaching and writings, but also through active participation in many committees and commissions. When he retired as Professor Emeritus in 1956, his activities increased rather than otherwise. He served as consultant in many foreign countries and India was one of them.

Although the demands on his time were many, Dr. Black accepted with enthusiasm the invitation sent to him by the Government of India in 1954, to review the research, teaching and public administration of the economics of agri-

culture in this country. He mentioned more than once that he considered this assignment to be one of the most important events of his long career.

My personal acquaintance with him was only for 66 days from April 11, to June 16, 1954 when he was working on this assignment. Short though this period was, I had the privilege of working with him in closest possible proximity day after day and I came to know him intimately as a devoted research worker, a distinguished adviser on matters of agricultural administration and, above all, as a great humanist. The intensity with which he worked during this short period in spite of his advanced age drew the admiration of every one who came in contact with him.

The Report that he prepared for the Government of India (in collaboration with Dr. H. A. L. Stewart) will remain a classic for a long time to come. It gives a general survey of the present status of research, teaching and public administration in the field of agricultural economics in India and makes a number of very useful suggestions. In addition, it outlines in some detail as many as 24 illustrative research projects in the fields of: (i) Production and land use economics of the farm and village; (ii) Consumption economics of the family; (iii) Marketing and prices of farm products; (iv) Rural credit; (v) Land tenure and (vi) The nation as an economic unit. The Report also emphasises very strongly the need for paying greater attention to the subject of agricultural economics and for strengthening the various Government and University Departments which are engaged on agro-economic research, surveys and teaching. The Report was found so useful that the Indian Council of Agricultural Research promptly gave effect to one of its main recommendations by constituting a committee on agricultural economic research and the structure for research, teaching and public administration in this field in India was sought by the Government of India to be built on the lines indicated in this Report. For a long time to come, Dr. Black's Report will continue to provide the guide lines for agricultural economics research and studies in this country.

I can pay homage to the memory of Prof. Black no better than by reminding ourselves of what he said about the role of the agricultural economist in India: "The situation in India presents a great challenge to an economist because it gives economics an opportunity to make a contribution far exceeding that in the countries with much larger resources per person and more recently occupied. It did not matter greatly how the pioneers of our country, the United States, went about developing its resources so long as they developed them and made their abundance largely available to the people. In India, every development move needs to be analysed to determine its contribution to economic progress and whether it is the most important move to make next. Even more challenging is it that the leaders of India have seized upon development as the key to the future of India. Development is positive and constructive. It means building brick on brick, or block on block, the structure of a future India. In their least dimensions, the building blocks for the agricultural part of India are the individual cultivator families and their lands. Next come the villages. An economics of agriculture that is real, unlike some of the abstractions of the text books, will help in the shaping and firming up of those building blocks and fitting them into the structure of a more productive and secure Indian society."