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# THE TENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMISTS

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The first meeting of the International Conference of Agricultural Economists was held in 1929 at Dartington Hall, England. This estate was made available for the occasion by the owners, Dr. and Mrs. L. K. Elmhirst. Dr. Elmhirst, Founder President, is one of three persons from whom the idea to establish the I.C.A.E. was first developed. The other two were C. E. Ladd from Cornell University and C. S. Orwin from Oxford. The purpose of this First Conference was "to bring together agricultural economists from many different countries to discuss research results and research methods that were of common interest; to discuss national and international problems in the field of agricultural economics, and to promote a more effective and more rapid exchange of agricultural economics information." At the Second Conference a constitution was formally accepted and the object agreed to then has since remained unchanged. It is that of "fostering development of the science of agricultural economics and of furthering the application of the results of economic investigation of agricultural processes and agricultural organisation in the improvement of economic and social conditions relating to agriculture and rural life."

There have been ten conferences in all, with memberships ranging from the fifty which represented eleven countries at the First, to the 500 from twenty-three countries at the Fifth. At the Tenth, in India this year, a record number of fifty-three countries was represented by a total membership of about 350. Conferences have been held every two or three years since the First one in 1929, except that after the Fifth in 1938 the Sixth was not held until 1949. The next Conference will be in 1961 in Mexico.

## *The Tenth Conference Programme*

The theme of this Conference was "Agriculture and Its Terms of Trade," and the organisers intended that discussion would be focused on "problems of balance between agriculture and other activities in the process of the economic growth of States and the development of a sound world economy." The programme was divided into three main parts and the papers read in each are shown below.

### **PART I. Retrospect: The Shifting Fortunes of Agriculture**

The General Setting. Arthur Lewis.

The Experience of Highly Developed Countries. D. Gale Johnson.

The Experience of Less Fully Developed Countries. D. R. Gadgil.

**PART II. *Factors Influencing Agriculture's Terms of Trade***

Technical Peculiarities of Agricultural Supply. Sherman E. Johnson and K. L. Bachman.

Changes in the Demand for Farm Products. M. Cepede.

Changes in Composition of Farm Inputs and Farm Outputs. N. Westermack.

The Disparate Stability of Farm and Non-Farm Prices. A. Hanau.

Lack of Flexibility in Agriculture. R. Bicanic.

Population Movements. K. O. Campbell.

**PART III. *Scope for National and International Action***

Education, Research and Extension. A. T. Mosher.

Using Economic Research in Policy Making. T. H. Strong.

Marketing, Communications and Transport. W. S. Anderson.

Agricultural Support Measures. J. H. Kirk.

Finance for Development. E. de Vries.

Population Movements. K. O. Campbell.

Interdependent Development of Agriculture and Other Industries. U. A. Aziz.

International Organisations.

(a) International Agencies. D. Paarlberg.

(b) Commodity Agreements. W. E. Haviland.

(c) Inter-Regional Groupings. G. Baptist.

“Planning” Procedures (3 topics).

(a) India. J. J. Anjaria.

(b) Japan. K. Ohkawa.

(c) Israel. L. E. Samuel.

International Co-operation in Agricultural Economics. J. R. Currie.

*The Papers*

This is not the place to discuss the papers, but the following general remarks may be in order. Being an International Conference, it is appropriate to record that two of the twenty-three papers were given by Australians, namely Professor K. O. Campbell and Dr. T. H. Strong, and that both were very well received.

Two papers in particular made a lasting impression on me. They were “Education, Research and Extension,” by Dr. A. T. Mosher, and “Independent Development of Agriculture and Other Industries,” by Dr. U. A. Aziz. Neither of these authors presented other than incidental facts, but they presented ideas capable of generating fruitful

thought and hypotheses for widely differing environments. In making this point I am revealing something of my own preferences. But obviously, at a conference where the terms of reference are so wide, all papers cannot be of the same kind, and at almost any conference there is room for sharp factual analysis such as that in Professor D. Gale Johnson's paper, for competent review as in Professor K. O. Campbell's paper, and so on.

For me, and I think many others, too, the most interesting papers were those which dealt with the underdeveloped type of economy in which so many of us found ourselves for the first time. Those who had accepted invitations to give papers on topics which bore little or no relevance to underdevelopment were offered a task, the successful accomplishment of which was made particularly difficult by the fact that for the time being the main interest of most members was elsewhere.

### *Workshops*

Round-table discussions or workshops were a novel feature of this conference. Each member joined a group to discuss one of several topics such as extension, teaching, farm management, and policy. Each group had a discussion-leader-chairman, recording-secretary and two advisers, and met for two hours' organised discussion on four occasions. Discussion continued throughout each workshop period from where the last one left off and at a fifth meeting members of all groups assembled to hear reports of the discussions made by the secretaries.

These workshops achieved two things. One was that they gave everyone an opportunity to make a contribution in close yet formal discussion. Secondly, they provided members with an opportunity to meet each other in yet another set of circumstances. But the formation of these groups on the basis of very wide interests only, did not allow them to function as efficiently as perhaps they could have, had they been organised differently. I think that differences in backgrounds between members were too great for each person to receive from, as well as to contribute to these discussions. For this, people must not be too different, or the subject matter must be narrowed. Discussions in the workshops may have been more fruitful had they been formed according to more restricted subject matter, or had certain papers in the plenary sessions constituted the topics for discussion. The papers of Mosher and Aziz already referred to would have been admirable for this purpose.

### *Excursions and Tour*

Between sessions there were several excursions to give members "a few glimpses of the renascent India; the throbings of a new economic life, the silent social revolution, the practical aspirations and ideas of her people." These excursions included visits to sugar, silk and sandal-wood oil factories, a multi-purpose co-operative society, an agricultural research station, a village-level workers' training centre, several villages and a tea estate. They also included a visit to the Palace, art gallery, technical institutes and the beautiful illuminated Brindavan Gardens at the Krishnaraja Sagar Dam, all in Mysore State.

The conclusion of the Conference marked the beginning of a cross-country tour of nearly 2,000 miles by air-conditioned trains from Bangalore to New Delhi via Madras, Ajanta and Ellora Caves, the Taj Mahal in Agra City and the Bhakra-Nangal hydro multi-purpose project. The tour was orientated mainly towards the national monuments of India, and, unfortunately I think, to the almost complete exclusion of current developments.

#### *Post-Conference Symposium*

The post-conference tour ended in New Delhi, where members were assembled in the well-appointed conference room in the Vigyan Bhavan. Here they were invited to comment and to make suggestions to their Indian colleagues, in the light of what they had heard and seen in the previous weeks. Purposely no warning was given about the nature or form of this symposium, to ensure that impressions would be given without modification by second thoughts. The idea was good, but I think that it did not yield anything that our hosts did not already know. This is not surprising. Although the Conference was held in India, neither the theme nor the papers had been designed to deal specifically with the problems of under-developed countries. Here are some of the comments made at the symposium: "Water, seed, fertiliser and know-how are the limiting factors in India rather than land." "There is a need for technologists rather than economists." "Extension officers seem to be telling people what to do rather than leading them to it." "There is need for greater support of social community developments." "Dung is used for fuel; it should be used as a fertiliser and there is a need to find other sources of fuel." "Import restrictions on fertilisers should be eased." "There is great scope for the development of rural industries; agricultural implement making, early stages of food processing and storage and better farm housing may be more useful than weaving." And so on.

#### *India*

To see and learn as much as possible about India was, no doubt, as important to many members as the Conference itself. A few remarks, therefore, on my own impressions of India may be of interest.

Poverty was the most conspicuous feature. To merely read that poverty goes with ignorance, disease, unemployment, beggary, filth and early death is hardly the same thing as seeing it all. My visit to India put meaning into the notion of poverty.

I became ashamed of the small amount of resources we in Australia are devoting to our "untouchables"—the aborigines and half- and quarter-castes. Possibly there is nowhere else in the world where there are so few coloureds so poorly off in the same country with so many whites so well off and where there is so little done by the latter for the former. In India, on the other hand, the untouchables are so many and the rich are so few, and yet untouchability has been made illegal and the under-privileged persons who come within the scope of this and other legislation are full citizens of India with special social services, special job opportunities and with specified representation in government.

One could not but help notice the apparent lack of bitterness toward the British. Just as we tend to be orientated in our time scale to "since the end of the War," so in India their reference is "since Independence," and that is all.

There seems to be a keenness to build and develop the economy. How well this is being done cannot be determined readily. But I found myself thinking that literacy and political awareness are growing faster than the rate of economic development and that this does not bode well for democracy in India.

The finest remark I heard in India was made by an American: "This country is a challenge to all of us."

So much for the Conference and India except to state that I wish that I could have shared my experience with many more Australians; to express my gratitude to those who enabled me to be one of the travelling fellows; and to record that our various hosts in India really did put themselves out to organise, to accommodate and to entertain in grand style the visiting members of the I.C.A.E.