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Vol XVI
No. 3

ISSN 0019-5014

JULY-
SEPTEMBER
1961

INDIAN JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS



INDIAN SOCIETY OF
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS,
BOMBAY

BOOK REVIEWS

The Economic Background to Agricultural Policy, Edith H. Whetham, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1960. Pp. xii+147. 22s 6d.

The book combines a treatise on agricultural economics theory and an analytical history of British agriculture. The former appears to be intended to give an appropriate theoretical background to the reader, while the latter attempts an evaluation of agricultural policies in the light of the progress made by and changes that came about British agriculture. In a number of cases illustrations have been drawn from conditions in other parts of the world to emphasize certain points or to explain the regional variations in farm conditions or agrarian policies. The book is well-written and though it is difficult to say that the sequences and presentation provide a natural and chronological flow of topics, the author imparts a good deal of comprehension and coverage to the subject.

The author claims "to provide an analysis of agricultural policies in a form suitable for students of agriculture, for practitioners in farming and for other persons interested in planning." Looking to the topics covered it may be conceded that the book provides for a grasp of the important concepts in agricultural economics theory. However, the book appears to be somewhat inadequate for advanced students. If it had included certain later and recent advances in agricultural economic theory, it would have usefully provided at one place the bulk of the fresh thinking on the subject which the students of the subject would very much like to be equipped with. The book thus may be said to be laid out more or less in the traditional style of the earlier contributions. These comments, however, have to be read in the context of the development of the thought in Great Britain and the fact of the author's preoccupation with the theme with reference primarily to her country. It will also certainly be of use to 'persons interested in planning' but it would be difficult to suggest whether the practitioners in farming would be able to make use of it in the numerous field problems that confront them.

In the treatment of the history of British agriculture, the author has brought out the part played by technological change in the progress and expansion of British agriculture. The growth of the non-agricultural sector, the technical change in agriculture, the rising levels of national incomes, and phenomenal progress of productivity and production in agriculture brought forth certain problems of surpluses and falling farm incomes. There were also dangers flowing from free international trade which brought about an inflow of farm produce from other countries and deepened the crisis at home. It was to meet these emergencies that various measures such as import tariffs, quotas, import restrictions, price support, deficiency payments, acreage allotments and restrictions, etc., were brought into play. The author's contention is that most of them did not relieve the situation and in some ways worsened problems which they intended to tackle. The author suggests that this happened because the measures were either going counter to or were applied independently of the basic change in agricultural economy that was at work which promoted abundance and lowered farm prices. Besides, the policy changed according to the requirements of the situation at different times and under different circumstances and gave an impression of a series of patch work designed to meet emergent situations arising from time to time. The reader

would search in vain for the author's own views on agricultural policy and the measures which will meet the needs of the situation. In her anxiety to emphasize her thesis, she almost repeats the arguments made in the earlier chapters of the book in the summary at the end without providing conclusions which would emerge from the study. Some indication of appropriate policy measures would have greatly enhanced the value of the publication.

The book has its own lessons for under-developed countries like ours with backward and structurally weak agriculture. The author emphasises certain inevitable developments in an expanding economy. A progressive agriculture tends to occupy a smaller and smaller place in the national economy in terms of employment and contribution to national income. In this process alone it would add to its unit productivity through a rapid technological advance and basic structural changes. The author usefully points out that some measures designed to protect tenants and small farmers, for instance, would harm precisely the groups designed to be helped or protected, if this basic truth is not appreciated. The illustrations for these have been drawn from British conditions, but like truth they are universal and, therefore, valid under our conditions also. This has been illustrated by the effects of measures of land taxation, land prices and transfer regulations and rent restrictions adopted in Great Britain. On one aspect of the agrarian laws designed to protect the weaker sections the author succinctly remarks: "No form of land tenure, however perfect in theory, can prevent extreme poverty among occupiers whose numbers are increasing faster than the area of land or the volume of alternative employments."

The critical comments on some aspects of the book ought not to detract from its value and the place it should occupy in the literature on the subject. The students of Agricultural Economics in India will benefit from the useful ideas contained in the book.

M. B. DESAI

India's Food Problem, M. L. Dantwala, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1961. Pp. 40. Rs. 1.50.

The brochure embodies the three lectures Prof. Dantwala delivered in Delhi in April, 1960 under the auspices of the Indian Council of World Affairs. The title of the brochure is modest as, besides the Food Problem, it also deals with some of the basic issues of the country's rural economy. This small publication, in effect, succinctly puts the main agrarian problems so forthrightly, and yet so objectively, that it gives a reader an extremely clear perception of certain issues about which controversies have been raging for long. The reviewer particularly feels greatly rewarded to find support in Prof. Dantwala to a number of ideas to which he has veered round through years of study of the subject and observations of the Indian rural scene.

Hardly would anyone differ from the author's analysis of the trends in food production, prices, yields and demand. The ideas which Prof. Dantwala enunciates on the structural problems and their solution would also find much support.