

THE PROVINCIAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL

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The recommendations of the Sub-Committee of this Council have just been published (vide official summary published in the 'Hindu' dated the 17th October 1936).

In these days of universal economic depression and acute unemployment, it is satisfactory to note that the Committee urge "an enquiry into the subject of rural income and standard of living". One would however think that this is too vast a subject for a purely advisory body like the Economic Council effectively to undertake.

That the matter of standardisation of weights and measures should, in the opinion of the Committee, be deferred until after the inauguration of the New Constitution is unfortunate. That the primary producer and the consumer have long suffered and are suffering from the inequities of the existing system is a well known fact. The subject is non-controversial and no one would murmur if the Council had pressed upon the attention of Government the urgency of a measure of reform in this direction which is overdue.

The public would welcome the suggestion of the Committee that Breeding Stations and Sub-stations for paddy may be opened in Vizagapatam, Chigleput, Kistna, Nellore, the Periyar area in Madura, Tinnevely and South Kanara. It is to be noted that this recommendation has reference chiefly to rainfed areas and coastal districts. Tankfed areas in the interior are not negligible and deserve better attention than has been accorded by the Council.

The Committee rightly stress the need for attaching a fruit section to all Agricultural Stations where conditions permit but, it is feared, that they overstep the limit when they suggest that the area of the farms at Samalkota, Aduthurai and Pattukkottai should be increased by 35, 15 and 15 acres respectively.

Consolidation of cultivation on a co-operative basis with a view to forming large scale farms seems to be a pious hope. Wherever conditions permit, ryots do such cultivation and there are limits to co-operative farming as agriculture is still primarily an industry of the individual in India.

'Economics' has for several years formed an important part of the agricultural course at the Agricultural college. A perusal of the College calendars would show that the Committee has been misled in this matter and that their recommendation in this regard is therefore superfluous.

The Committee make a wholesome suggestion that Elementary Teachers should have training in agriculture but their recommendation that facilities should be afforded at Agricultural Stations seems to ignore the fundamental facts that Agricultural farms are opened under rural surroundings where cultivation is possible and training schools are located in urban areas where pupils are available in numbers. Their recommendation should, in order that it may become practicable and useful, aim at a small area being attached to training schools. These schools should be located in or transferred to localities where such facilities can be secured.

Presidents of District Boards who are *ipso facto* members of the District Economic Councils can very well lead the way, as one or two have already done without any objection from Government, in giving effect to the recommendation that an agricultural graduate should be appointed in every high school to give such instruction as will give an agricultural bent to students. Government will most surely and gladly help in this direction. There can be no doubt on this point.

The recommendation that Government should purchase and maintain and encourage co-operative societies and ryots to purchase and maintain bull calves from ryots and sell them when old enough as breeding bulls, will not receive general agreement of the discerning public. The cost and risk involved in rearing bull calves until they grow and are declared fit for service are so great that no co-operative institution or ryot can in the present state of public finance invest on bull calves as such. Much more than in the case of crop seed, it should form one of the functions of the Development Departments of Government to undertake this piece of work. All are aware that cattle improvement is a slow process and that the cattle farms in this Presidency have not distributed even an appreciable number of bulls in proportion to the total cattle population. In this respect sure and steady work is important, if satisfactory results are to be obtained: opening of more cattle farms will be one solution of this vexed problem.

Revival of Tank Restoration Scheme parties is as urgent a matter as investigation of irrigation projects, the area under tank irrigation being very large. The Kudimaramat system seems in the opinion of the Committee to have failed of its purpose and most would favour the execution of repairs by Government owing to existence of factions in villages.

In regard to underground water and its availability for cultivation five recommendations have been made which deserve careful attention on the part of the authorities. It is not known what action was taken on the survey of underground waters made by the Agricultural Engineer over a decade ago.

Touching the recommendation that Government should undertake in suitable areas sinking of irrigation wells and distribution of pumped water, it may be added that in Chittoor, North Arcot, Chingleput, South Arcot and parts of Ramnad and Vizag where the water table is high, such attempts are likely to be more successful and need earlier attention as the extension of electric schemes to those districts would become possible in the near future.

In the matter of crop improvement, the very striking example set by the Bombay magnate Mr. Walchand Hirachand in awarding a prize of Rs. 1000 to the cultivator of sugarcane who produces 100 tons of cane per acre may very well be repeated by the Government and interested parties in Madras.

In this connection mention may be made of the action of the U. S. S. R. in stimulating production of cotton by paying the growers on a graded scale. "Those who raise 2 tons per hectare are paid at 180-200 roubles per 100 kilogram, and for those raising 3 tons the price is from 230-250 roubles per 100 kilogram, though the price for the "American" raw cotton, grown on the irrigated region, is 110 roubles per 100 kilogram. Likewise, in the non-irrigated regions yield of 500 kilograms per hectare is paid at 151 roubles per 100 kilogram; if the harvest is 700 kilograms the rate is 238 roubles and for one metric ton the rate is 307 roubles."

Further extension of cultivation of sugarcane whether North of Kuttalam in Tanjore District or elsewhere in the Presidency may wait until after the Tariff Board next examines the question of sugar industry in this country in a year or two, as cheap sugar from Upper India where costs of cultivation are smaller cannot be kept out from Madras even under the conditions of provincial autonomy next year.

Most of the other recommendations of the Committee would meet with general approval as they indicate a distinct step forward in the direction of improvement of the ryot's economic conditions.

Time, labour and funds are prime factors and the extent to which these latter are made available will determine the degree of development reached.

With the experience that will accrue of their working in the interval, the new ministry of 1937 one hopes would be in a position to examine the constitution and functions of District Boards, District Educational Councils and District Economic Councils and their relationship with or dependence upon Government departments and to introduce such measures as will tend to make them live units in the Governmental administration.