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Editorial

Industrial Crops : It is a truism that a person afflicted with a malady can think of nothing else and in this morbid state of mind falls a prey to the advice of any one who professes to know a speedy and sure cure rather than listen to his family physician. Unfortunately, India is in such a state to-day in regard to the food crisis and lends her ears too easily to the innumerable suggestions, plans and programmes which promise to usher an era of plenty and prosperity without reference to their practicability or advisability. Among the proposals which in our opinion is fraught with grave danger to the future balanced economy of the nation is the proposal emanating from certain quarters that the area under the so-called industrial crops should be restricted, by legislative enactments. We are afraid that in the panic caused by the dislocation of our food supply, we are apt to lose our sense of values and allow enthusiasts for special causes to hold the field. We submit that the cultivator himself and also the group of persons employed by the state to offer advice on agricultural matters, namely the organised agricultural departments in the various Provinces, have a right to be heard on the matter.

Now, let us consider dispassionately what would happen if the proposals to restrict the production of cotton, sugarcane or groundnut, is restricted by a ukase of the Government without taking into consideration the needs of the nation in respect of these commodities, and the area so released is put under food crops. The prices of cloth and sugar in the first instance will rise and foreign countries will dictate their own terms for supplying our needs. As we write, we hear the textile interests protesting that the price of cotton imported from outside, is

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beyond their capacity to bear. The history of a recent transaction in jute, is another pointer indicating what lies ahead. Our industries which depend on these commodities will be thrown out of gear and industrial labour already troublesome will grow restless and communism will find a fertile field for spreading discontent and create chaos. Nor is this all. The cultivator baulked at every attempt to increase his wealth will sink into apathy and lacking incentive, will slacken his efforts even with regard to food production.

It should be realised that ultimately the nation as a whole has to foot the bill, whether it is for food or clothing and in a world organised on a monetary economy, as it is at present, the nation with less money at its disposal will ultimately come to grief.

Apart from the undesirable economic repercussions, which we foresee if the policy of undue restriction on the production of industrial crops is restored to, let us consider the agricultural aspect of the problem. Except in the deltaic tracts as in the Tanjore district, where owing to lack of drainage only paddy could be grown with profit and certain areas in the West Coast where growing of crops other than paddy is precluded by seasonal and soil conditions, the bulk of cultivatable land in other parts of the province both in the rainfed and irrigated tracts are suited to the growing of a variety of crops. In these areas cropping practices have been adjusted by the cultivators to ensure conservation of soil fertility, the prevention and multiplication of pests and diseases and avoidance of soil sickness. The seasonal rainfall is also utilised to a maximum extent. Mixed and rotational cropping in which surface rooted cereals are grown along with or in rotation with deep rooted crops like cotton are in vogue in the entire dry land area of the province. The introduction of the groundnut has given the cultivator a handy crop which can be grown with profit in many places during seasons when other crops will not do so well. The cultivator has by long experience learnt to grow just the crops that will give him maximum returns in his land in relation to seasonal factors, such as for example the date of receipt of the first rain and it will be risky indeed to restrict his choice.

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We are of opinion therefore that centralised direction in such matters is attendant with grave risks, and crop planning and regulation from above without reference to local conditions will not only be difficult to carry out in practice, but also even if practicable, would fail to achieve the desired results.

This is not to say that state interference in all cases is undesirable. It goes without saying that the growing of narcotics like opium and ganja should be absolutely prohibited. The tendency in the Northern Circars to encroach on wetlands for the growing of virginian tobacco is to be curbed. The practice of growing tobacco continuously in the Guntur area without resulting to rotation should be put an end to. But barring these exceptional cases which should be dealt with according to the merits, it is our considered opinion that the cultivator should be free to grow the crops which will bring him the most profitable returns. In order to make him grow food crops which is of utmost necessity to-day, he should be offered sufficient inducement (1) by price adjustment narrowing the wide disparity between the prices of food grains on the one hand and industrial raw products on the other (2) by taking away the excess profits from industrial crops by judicious graded taxation (3) by extending the irrigation systems, and providing land in which food crops can be raised with profit.

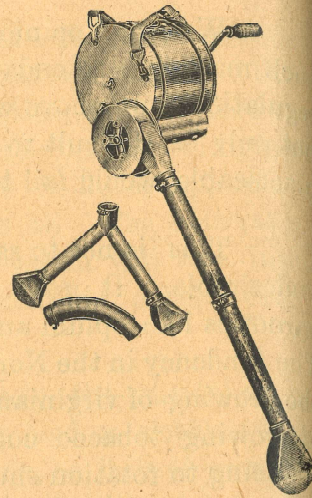
There are signs that slump is round the corner and when it comes it is the cultivator who will be hardest hit, and in any planning for agricultural production this aspect should not be lost sight of.



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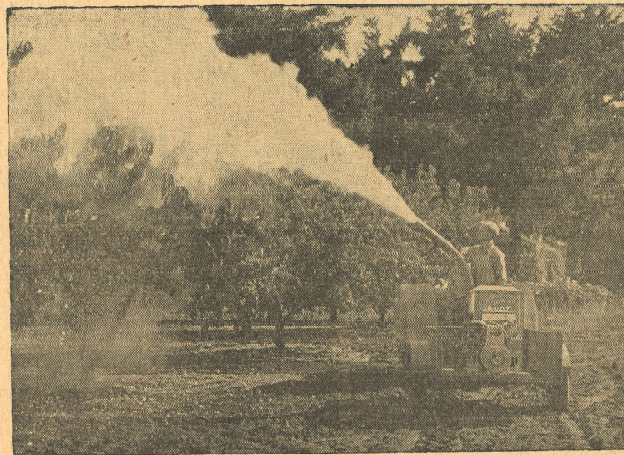
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