

A Provincial Board of Agriculture.

“The Council recommends to the Governor in Council that a Board of Agriculture be established for this Province”. Such was the resolution that the Hon’ble Dewán Bahadur M. Ramachandra Rao placed before the meeting of the Legeslative Council held on the 5th April 1919.

This resolution owes its source to a circular of the Government of India to local Governments, suggesting for their consideration the advisability of inaugurating Provincial Boards of Agriculture to discuss annually on matters agricultural which are of purely local importance, on which the local Government would be more competent to discuss. In making this suggestion, it is stated that the Government of India had in view the possibility of enlisting the co-operation of non-officials like large landholders, representative agriculturists, and others interested in rural development. The objects of such a Board seem to have been to develop agricultural research, to organise agricultural experiments and to enlist the co-operation of those interested in Scientific Agriculture. The circular also suggested the advisability of the Agricultural Adviser presiding at the Provincial Board meetings occasionally in view of his wider experience in the development of agriculture.

The matter was referred by the Government to the Director of Agriculture who consulted the Imperial Officers of the Department and discussed the matter with heads of sections at Coimbatore, and came to the conclusion that such a Board was unnecessary, which the Government accepted. The Hon’ble member in proposing the above resolution criticised at length the various objections raised by the Director of Agriculture.

One of the reasons why such a Board was found unnecessary was that the formation of such a Board would entail dislocation of the work of the officers concerned, and the result would not be commensurate with the time occupied. The Hon’ble member took exception to this reason, because he thought that one of the objects desired by the Government of India was lost sight of by the Director, namely,

the securing of the active support in modern agricultural methods of the large landed proprietors. Mr. Ramachandra Rao was not prepared to accept the view of the average official, who, according to him, seems to have very little to do "with district Boards, Municipalities, and Taluk Boards if he can help it or with any form of association or with any other non-official organisation such as this."

Although we are in general agreement with the Hon'ble member regarding the co-operation between the officers and agriculturists which he thinks is essential for modern improvements to be introduced into the country, we believe we see practical difficulties, which Mr. Ramachandra Rao does not, in the accomplishment of such an object. Two points need to be cleared first. If such a board came into being, who are the landholders that will co-operate and how will they help in the development of agricultural research and organise agricultural experiment? We fear that it is most difficult to appeal to the right sort of men. The landed aristocracy, who ought to be a source of strength in the dissemination of knowledge on agricultural improvements, are sadly lacking in practical experience of farming. A few possess home-farms, no doubt, in which they carry on improvements at the suggestion of the department, but the bulk of them are not yet sufficiently interested in agriculture. The people that would be most profited by such a Board would be the actual cultivators, who, however, are beset with the language barrier. Yet, there are a large number of absentee land-lords whose vocation is law, and who have sunk their savings on land, but who have not much knowledge of the practical difficulties. They cannot pretend to be the spokesmen of the ryots, because they have no first-hand knowledge and their advice is scoffed at when proffered.

The Hon'ble member remarks that the Director of Agriculture stated that an informal Agricultural Conference is held every year under the auspices of the Madras Agricultural Students' Union at the time of the College Day. Mr. Ramachandra Rao assumes that College days generally are matters of merry-making and infers that the conferences which follow them must necessarily be the same. Mr. Ramachandra Rao has, we believe, never paid a visit to a Conference under

the auspices of the Madras Agricultural Students' Union, and, if our memory fails not, he excused himself from reading a paper at the Conference when requested to do so not long ago. Still, we can assure Mr. Ramachandra Rao that if he accepts the challenge and attends the College Day and Conference next December, we are sure he would withdraw his sweeping remarks. We are, however, not prepared to say that this Conference takes the place of a Board such as the Government of India contemplated. Its usefulness is limited and at best it can touch only a few. The Board should be held, if the Government on reconsideration think it might, at a place more convenient than Coimbatore. If the people are carefully selected, and a definite programme previously laid down, we do not see any reason why such a Board should not serve a useful purpose. We would go a step further and suggest that the Board might hold its sittings at different farms, so that people of that locality might visit in large numbers and discuss problems affecting them most. If the language difficulty is got over, we are sure such a Conference is pregnant with great potentiality for usefulness. This at once points to the desirability of all the Imperial Agricultural Officers to be able to converse freely in the vernaculars.

In his reply to the Government, the Director of Agriculture suggests the substitution of Inter-departmental Conferences in the place of a Provincial Board. This is, in our opinion, begging the question. Mr. Ramachandra Rao is of the opinion that a Board similar to that of the Board of Agriculture in Britain should be established if necessary on statutory basis as an administrative body. We do not think conditions here are similar to permit of such an undertaking at present. A beginning can however be made, and we do not think that such an important question should be summarily shelved. We take the liberty to advise the large landholders to evince more interest on land and its improvement for which the Agricultural Department exists, and the departmental officers to make every effort on their part to make such conferences a realisation, in order to see how far they would tend to expand research and advance agricultural experiment.

Contributed.