

at a concession rate to any person or body that undertakes its distribution. Of course, the *gawali* must be in a position to assure his customer that the milk he is selling is absolutely unadulterated. Such wholesale customers will also be able to prepare for sale curd, buttermilk or skimmed milk, and look after butter or ghee. The need for an agency to dry cattle, and to relieve him of his old and unserviceable cattle has already been mentioned before. The least that he should expect of any agency that removes his dead cattle is not to ask him to pay for the removal, as we understand that quite a profitable business can be worked out of dead cattle. If a big corporation or company chooses to do all these things itself, well and good. It would need an enormous capital but it would reap all the benefits too. By decentralizing, the profits will be divided among the various groups taking part in the scheme, a circumstance for which there can be no reason to regret.

Complete co-operation of all sections will have to be secured so that none may profiteer at the expense of the others. Numerous instances of such decentralizing would be quoted in respect of various industries, but we think it is unnecessary to do so.

Conclusion.—The first need of the milk industry is to increase production. This should be done by making it easy for people of small means to undertake the trade. There must be numerous centers for imparting the necessary education. Co-operative Societies will be necessary in most of its branches. In the early stages at least, Government will have to take the lead and give a great deal of guidance and active assistance. What important part Government will have to play in the matter, is clearly indicated in the table. We feel sure, with such encouragement from Government, people will offer their fullest co-operation to the endeavour and all will benefit in the end.

Agricultural Workers in India

A. M. LORENZO

Analysing the various factors that have led to the disintegration of our rural economy, Dr. Lorenzo, in the following study, establishes a correlation between village unsettlement and wider political disturbances. Dr. Lorenzo is on the Faculty of the University of Lucknow.

THE *Present Agrarian Situation.*—Problems of land and labour in India, as in all the agricultural countries of the world, are the most significant amongst national questions. Indian agriculture exhibits a wide diversity of land systems and policies, each cast into its characteristic regional framework of economic and social life, with its distinct inevitable reactions on the status of the peasants. The factors which have governed the evolution of different types of land holdings and village communal life have been so welded together into an organic whole that a final analysis of them is almost an impossible task. The problems which thus arise are, therefore, not only complex and difficult, but often misleading to the

present academic economists, whose conclusions are almost always vitiated by Western norms and notions, which hardly apply to Indian conditions. Although political conquests have left deep marks on the rural economy of India and influenced the growth of manorial estates and feudal types of village organisation, which represent characteristic features of the rural economy of the European countries, the time-honoured village communal organizations still largely govern the transformation of the relations of the agricultural population. The present agricultural regime has not only given rise to feudal holdings and absentee landlordism, but has completely ignored the village communal rights which once balanced the drawbacks

of peasant farming. The social and economic history of the origin and development of village communities, therefore, has yet to cover much new ground, and the future of Indian agrarian reform should have room for the introduction of some common feature into the land policies of various Provinces, with a view to safeguarding the interests of the actual tillers of the soil, whether they are cultivating owners, tenant cultivators, or landless serfs.

The problems of land are intimately bound up with those of human labour. Whenever the land has been touched, its reactions have been felt deep in the roots of the rural society. The present agricultural retrogression is largely the result of encroachments and defective land administration ; and the Indian peasant has suffered gravely from periodical re-settlements and praedial exactions which have left him nothing more than skin and bone. In view of agrarian disturbances, almost all the Provincial Governments of India have been contemplating some measure of land reform to stabilize agricultural conditions. But the most unfortunate feature of these reforms has been the entire neglect of certain broad features of socio-political discontent in different sections of the rural community. The Government policy towards the varied landed interests has suffered from a narrow provincial outlook, and therefore peasant proprietorship and tenancy, recently, have undergone significant changes.

Tenancy legislation has, so far, failed to give adequate protection to the toiling, unorganised, long-suffering, but all-important factor in the machinery of Indian rural life. The great mistake of tenancy reform has been that, in its effort to recreate peasant proprietorship, it created the right of sale and purchase whereby the superior proprietor, and sometimes the surrendering tenant as well, have extorted some profit from the transaction. In Bengal, Bihar, and the U. P., owing to the increase of population and the competition for holdings,

the evil has been considerably aggravated. In the U. P., due to the creation of permanent hereditary rights, the system of taking premiums from the tenants has prevailed and the practices of levying *nasrana* and illegal enhancements of rents in various guises are not unusual. In almost all parts of the country the professional and moneyed classes have aspired to become small landlords by buying out the original ryots. Their land is cultivated by hired labour or by uprooted tenants on share agreements without any legal status. The rapid increase of this labour class has not only created absentee rent-receivers and an inferior peasantry, but it has multiplied the claim of sub-infeudatories and intermediaries. Evils of this type have not been combated as yet by legislation. The constitution of the economic holdings, prevention of fresh subdivision, restriction of transfer and subletting, protection of the inferior peasantry who obtain land or stock from the richer farmers, and the suppression of illegal exactions—all demand protective legislation. There are, then, the landless labourers involved in debt and hiring out their labour from plot to plot, to eke out a miserable existence verging on starvation. Even more pathetic is the condition of the serfs. Bound hand and foot from generation to generation, and restricted in their movements, they deserve much greater attention and sympathy than as yet they have been able to attract.

These features of agrarian discontent have rendered the situation both pathetic and tragic. Pathetic, because the agricultural labourers who looked to the trustees of land (Zamindars and the State) for some measure of protection and relief have been betrayed to their doom; and tragic, because this betrayal may be the presage of the trustees' own disaster. This is the result of an outstanding defect of policy, an error of principle and method, which has marked not only our relations within the country but also with other nations. The *pons*

asinorum of our agricultural policy is that the State refuses to face a situation which has not actually arisen, or to shape a policy, or to give undertakings, in respect of it. It prefers to deal with each issue as and when it arises. Acting on such a precarious principle we often change policy radically and act quickly when the event is upon us, with the result that neither is the existing situation controlled nor the future safeguarded.

Recent Trends in the Rural Economy of India.—The beginning years of the twentieth century, which mark the present transition from the communal type of farming to the individual system of economic toil, have been associated with a host of new tendencies which have intensified the problems of agrarian unsettlement in the country. The economic retrogression in India began with the vast migration and shifting of population within various occupational zones. Between 1891-1911 nearly twenty-three million people deserted rural and urban industrial pursuits in favour of cultivation; and due to a rise in agricultural prices and growing rural prosperity during the decade 1911-21, another ten million were drawn to agriculture. This transference from various industrial pursuits to agriculture continued during the early part of the following decade (1921-31), but soon the limit was reached. Unfortunately, agriculture could not offer the immigrants a position better than that of petty time-serving cultivators without any staying power. Moreover, the pressure on land steadily increased, and soon its repercussions were felt in the rural society. The Royal Commission on Labour remarked that, "over large parts of India the number of persons on the land is much greater than the number required to cultivate it, and appreciably in excess of the number it can comfortably support." The closing years of the decade 1921-31, saw the turn of the tide. From 1928 agricultural calamities came thick and fast, and once again a movement of both small tenants and landless

agricultural workers towards the industrial centres set in. Agriculture has now lost considerably to industry, and those hands which could not be absorbed by non-agricultural industries have fallen into the ranks of unspecified labourers and landless serfs. The growth of this huge floating population has not only weakened our rural stability, but is, in large measure, responsible for the present industrial unrest. Labour legislation and housing reform, and the economic amelioration of the rural masses cannot be effective until the continuous cityward drift of the floating farm hands is checked by more accommodating measures.

Secondly, there is going on a silent process of expropriation of the peasant proprietor. Landlordism, both of superior and inferior grades, has produced a land-hungry peasantry, and the small holders, overwhelmed by these circumstances, are declining from peasant proprietary to peasant proletariat. There is also the tendency for land to concentrate in the hands of non-cultivating rent-receivers. The chain of subinfeudation has often gone to grotesque lengths and has given rise to the same abuses which are characteristic of the *latifundia* farming in the West.

Peasant proprietorship in India has been weakened, not merely by the decline of village communities, which has outgrown their administrative use, but also by minute fragmentation resulting inevitably from an unchecked population pressure. Owing to the free mortgage and transfer of land and the decline of subsidiary cottage industries, the peasants have been driven off the land to supplement the proceeds of their holdings by outside work, or to sell their lands to middlemen or to more prosperous peasants. In other cases they have been forced to relinquish their land to the non-agricultural classes from whom they cultivate as tenants-at-will. Consequently, land has been concentrated, firstly, in the hands of large proprietors, and secondly, to the detriment of the whole country, in the hands of the non-

agricultural classes. In the United Provinces the non-agriculturists gained +654,000 acres whereas the agriculturists (especially Brahmans, Tagas and Bhuinhars) gained only + 418,000 acres between 1907-1926. The U. P. Banking Enquiry Committee in 1930 gave the figures for land concentration in the hands of non-agriculturists at +107,000 acres, and +179,000 acres by Brahmans and other agriculturists. In the Punjab, during the quinquennium 1923-27, nearly 37 per cent. of the vendors (owners of land) sold off the whole of their land and became landless. The sales of land in Jessore (in Bengal) have increased by nearly 40 per cent. In Mymensingh district 25 per cent. of the total agricultural area changes hands every ten years, in Jessore 15 per cent., and in Midnapur 7 per cent. In Birbhum, Murshidabad and Burdwan also a large portion of land has fallen into the hands of foreign money-lending classes. In the United Provinces during 1921-31, about 60 per cent. of the transferred land has passed into the hands of non-agriculturists, who were generally the creditors of the dispossessed owners. In some parts of the rural East the invasion of the Bania, the Marwari and the Dikku has been an economic menace. These money-lenders gradually become financier-proprietors by ousting the peasants by mortgages and land alienations. Having acquired the land as a money investment they seldom cultivate it by hired labour, but make the old occupancy raiyat an under-tenant who is forced to pay a produce rent irrespective of the yield. Redemptions are few. Thus, while the money-lending classes seldom lose a favourable opportunity of gaining land by loan-investments, the peasantry becomes indolent, litigious and impoverished, and gradually vanishes struggling impotently to regain its usurped crown.

Equally disastrous have been the results of the transfer of land among the agricultural classes. Small owners have to an appreciable extent been bought out by large land-owners. Even where the small owners have

sold to small owners and the big owners to big owners, the tendency of concentration on the one hand, and expropriation of the peasant proprietor on the other, is not insignificant. In the United Provinces 40 per cent. of the transferred land has passed on to other agriculturists notably the Rajputs and Muslims. The dispossessed land-owners who belonged to higher castes are usually the poor type of cultivators. In 1928 in the Punjab the total number of owners with holdings of one acre or less was 625,400 against 904,000 of cultivators in the same class—the difference accounting for over one-third of the landless cultivators. The increase in the number of farm-hands and field-workers from 291 to 407 per mille cultivators during 1921-31, without a corresponding increase in the actual holders of land, whether as tenants or farm-hands, is sufficient explanation for the large increase in the landless class. The strength of the landless field-workers has grown immensely during the past decades. There are at present 24,925,357 hired agricultural workers who have no interest in land even as tenant cultivators. Including the number of unspecified labourers, who constitute an important fund of labour for agriculture, the number of landless workers will swell to 32,703,999. If by 'landless' is meant the absence of ownership, no less than 66,877,903 peasants were found in 1931, constituting more than two-thirds of the labour population engaged in cultivation. Even if we were to assume that these tenant cultivators will mostly become cultivating owners as a result of the establishment of permanency of tenure for them, we find that more than one-third of the total number of agricultural labourers are landless workers having no greater stake in the land than their meagre and insufficient wages.

Thirdly, the growth of the Unspecified class, as distinguished from ordinary field-workers and farm-hands, presents new problems in the organization of agricultural workers in India. The relative figures of

Unspecified workers in general, and agricultural labourers in particular, serve to some extent as an index to the prosperity of agriculture. This class is of recent growth and its number fluctuates with agricultural seasons, because fairly large numbers work as field-workers as occasion offers.

The demand and supply of Unspecified workers is very largely regulated by seasons. During the sowing and harvesting seasons openings for them are fairly plentiful when the demand for and the price of agricultural labour rises. On an average, their labour on the fields is required for not more than three months ; therefore, for nine months in the year they keep on the move in search of employment in urban industries. If the Census were to be held in July, November or March, a large number of persons would be shown as agricultural labourers, but if it were taken in May and June the ranks of agricultural labourers would be thinned out proportionately in favour of the Unspecified class.

The sudden increase of non-cultivating rent-receivers is responsible for excessive subletting, especially in the permanently settled areas where sub-infundation has grown to a far-reaching degree. In such cases the sub-tenants, with faint hope of rising in prosperity, are enlisted only among the unsettled raiyats, temporary and seasonal, but they do not altogether give up former occupation in suburban mills, mines, and forests, and adopt agriculture only as a subsidiary means of livelihood. This class of sub-tenants is always unsettled, and although one member of the family may permanently look after the family holding, the rest of the members (of both sexes) move about in the capacity of Unspecified workers—unskilled, seasonal and unorganized. During 1921-31 the actual workers occupied in pasture and agriculture decreased by 2.4 per cent., but it is certain that this supplanted force of workers strengthened the ranks of the Unspecified class. The variation in the number of Unspecified

workers has to be examined along with the number of the agricultural workers and ordinary cultivators, because each class feeds the other at different intervals. The percentage of variations in the numerical strength of these classes is given below :—

	1911-21	1921-31
Ordinary cultivators.	-18.06	
Agricultural labourers--.	-8.1	+ 2.2
Labourers and workmen,		
Unspecified	+12.4	+30.8

During 1911-21 the increase in the number of ordinary cultivators was due to the decrease in the number of field-labourers, but the increase of 12.4 per cent, in the Unspecified class is due to the fact that a large number of villagers had abandoned their hereditary industrial pursuits in the face of machine competition. During 1921-31 the decrease in the number of cultivators is chiefly due to the significant decrease in owner-cultivators and marginal cultivators who had set up during the period of the agricultural boom of 1914-20. This floating population expelled from actual cultivation, plus a sufficiently large number of dependents who found no avenues of employment, account for the swelling up of the number of labourers and workmen of the Unspecified class.

In 1931 there were 7,778,642 labourers and workmen who were Unspecified in India,—an increase of about 31 per cent. since 1921, and nearly 45 per cent. since 1911. During 1911-21 there was a general fall in the number of Unspecified labourers in nearly all the provinces of India owing to the apparent increase in the number of ordinary cultivators, but once again there set in a "flight from the land" movement, which swelled the ranks of Unspecified workers and landless serfs during the decade of 1921-31.

The Present Labour Force.—In 1931 there were in India 93,884,003 agricultural labourers as against 103,287,706 in 1921. These figures indicate a decrease of about eight per cent, If we take into account only

the field-workers and farm-hands according to the definition of the Census, we would find that their number during 1921-31 rose from 21,676,107 to 24,925,357, or by nearly fifteen per cent. These groups of labourers are, however, of less economic importance than the tenants and owner-cultivators, forming as they do only 21% of the total agricultural labour population in India. Nevertheless these are the people who, when agricultural disasters occur, feel the pinch first for they have no reserve and are the first to be thrown out of employment. During the past decade the field-labourers have increased enormously, and in many parts of the country this change has been only for the worse. In four districts of the Punjab, i.e. Bahawalpur, Attock, Suket and Kapurthala, there is an increase of over 200% ; of over 100 and below 200% in five districts; between 50-100% in seven districts, and 20-50% in the three contiguous districts. In the U. P. the greatest proportion of field workers to tenants occurs in Jhansi, where there are 2 to every 3 tenants and in Meerut, where the proportion is 1 to every 2 tenants. Similarly, in the districts of Shahabad, Champaran and Hazaribagh in Bihar, the ranks of this class of labourers have considerably been swelled.

If we include the Unspecified class of workers and farm-hands, it would give the number at 32,703,999 labourers in 1931. But this again cannot be taken as final for our purposes, as it constitutes barely one-third of the labour power under consideration. We, therefore, arrive at our final figure by taking into account the labour of all workers directly employed in cultivation, whether in the capacity of owner cultivators, tenant cultivators, field-workers and farm-hands, and the Unspecified labourers. Thus we find that of the total number of agricultural labourers no less than one-third are floating farm-hands, and more than two-thirds are landless.

Problems of Economic and Social Relationships.—The economic status of agri-

cultural workers, judged by the amount of wealth and sources of income, social position and the mode of living, is indeed a matter of concern both for the statesmen and social reformers. There is no denying the fact that the wealth and income of the rural working classes are for the most part lower than those of their industrial confreres. Though rural wealth is more evenly distributed, and there are no great contrasts of the exceedingly rich and exceedingly poor individuals, the level of incomes is, in general, on par with the basic expenditures for bare existence. Our investigations in several parts of the country have shown that the proportion of the budget used for non-physiological expenses averages less in the country than in the city; hence the proportion of the budget' expended for items of current consumption other than so-called basic requirements is the best index of the higher level of living in urban areas. The average rate of wages of unskilled industrial workers in the U. P. before the outbreak of the War was Rs. 18/- per month, whilst it was only Rs. 8/-per month for unskilled agricultural workers. There is also a wide disparity in rural and urban incomes in Bombay, Bengal and the Punjab. Moreover, the size of the family also tends to reduce the amount of spendable income per adult unit in the rural family. The average number of children per family in India is 4'2 against 4.4 in rural families and 4.1 in urban families ; and the proportion of the total number of children surviving, per mille born, is appreciably higher in rural areas, i.e., 702 against 695 in urban areas. The ultimate result of this growth of dependents is that the proportion of the budget expended for items of basic necessities is increased at the expense of non-physiological expenses. Thus a lower income, a larger size of family, and a growing number of non-working dependents in rural working-class families tend to keep their standard of living on a very low level. Our studies have further disclosed that a large majority of agricul-

tural labourers all over the country cannot afford to consume energising foods. Most of them live in indigence and suffer from malnutrition and ill-health due to a deficient protein intake. The effective consumption of energising foods in the case of field-workers in the U. P. hardly exceeds 18 per cent. of the total amount of food consumed, while it is almost *nil* in the case of agricultural serfs like the Sewaks of Oudh and the Kamias of Chota Nagpur.

The problem of rural housing in India has hardly attracted the attention it deserves. Though rural houses are in some respects better than industrial slums, they represent neither a cottage nor a house known to European farmers. The rural huts, which are made of mud walls with thatched roofing, consist only of one room and have one entrance. Often these houses are built on land belonging to the landlord, and it can be understood what power a landlord wields over an agricultural worker settled on his land in the event of any dispute. Our investigations in Northern India have brought to light the congestion of rural houses and the overcrowding of small rooms by both the family members of agricultural workers and their livestock. According to Misra, "In Jaunpur (U.P.) the huts generally consist of only one dingy room with kitchen, dormitory, parlour and in many cases cattle-shed combined." In Gorakhpur, Mathur found, that a hut measuring 7 X 12 X 7 ft. was occupied by five persons and a goat; and in village Sheikhdhir (District Bahraich, U.P.) we found that a pair of puny bullocks, fishing tackle, and four members of a Guriya-easte labourer-family were huddled up into a dark, unventilated and stinky house measuring 14 X 20 X 9 ft. To many peasants the houses are simply places where they can stretch their legs and sleep at night, and in several instances the labourers' *privacy* blunts all sense of shame and decency. When men and women, young and old, healthy and sick are packed together with cattle in winter—the inmates

suffer from diseases and can find no comfort or rest, and the home that should radiate noble social and aesthetic influences becomes a den of misery and disease where people breed and die like fruit-flies. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the economic, social and moral regeneration of the rural folk will depend on the extent to which we are able to improve their living conditions.

Allied to the problems of poverty, malnutrition and poor housing, are the unhealthy conditions and long hours of work. The field worker grumbles that the working day is excessively long and the conditions of work akin to 'sweating'. In the industrial areas the eight-hour day is becoming common, but this is not possible on the farm due to the absence of regulated employment and the seasonal nature of agricultural operations. In the rush of season the long day field-work entails much fatigue and wastage of energy. Not unoften women and children are forced to work from sunrise to sunset with very little afternoon leisure, and the plight of the agricultural serf is always lost sight of in view of the fact that he is a twenty-four-hour servant of the landlord master. The unhealthy conditions of work considerably increase the liability to sickness and mortality, particularly amongst women and children. Illness in whatever form, whether due to overwork or unhealthy conditions of work, is both pathetic and tragic in the case of field-workers' families. It is pathetic, because even one day's absence from work leads them to starvation; and tragic, because the absence of medical aid and the means of procuring it most often result in untimely deaths. Therefore, not only should working hours be reduced and the conditions of work improved, but adequate protection should be given to agricultural workers against sickness, accident or unemployment. An important step in the prevention of exploitation of landless workers and the protection of

farm—hands from degeneration would lie in the direction of regulation of employment by legislative measures and social control.

The employment of women and children in agricultural pursuit presents new sociological problems. The family solidarity is often broken by the employment of children of tender ages and of women in distant fields. Since the income of the male earner is inadequate for the support of the average rural family, both women and children are driven to work at low wages. In the absence of any protective legislation, they are almost always exploited by their cruel masters. The removal of the mother from the home, and the weaning out of the child from the home-atmosphere at an early age, lead to serious social consequences. The family of the working classes not only cannot grow into a perfect social organization, but loses all the charms and potencies that go to make a social personality of its individual members. Economic needs of the rural workers, therefore, which seem to be given preference over social needs, tend in the long run to disintegrate the rural family and disrupt rural social solidarity.

More alarming is the persistence of agrestic serfdom and the growth of praedial exactions. No less than fifty million persons in the country, belonging to the depressed and exterior castes, are reduced to the status of serfs and *begars*, and they toil night and day on a dole of food on the fields of their masters. They are crushed under a huge burden of hereditary indebtedness from which there is no escape. A section of the people, thus enslaved and exploited calls for immediate remedial measures. Agrestic serfdom, forced labour (*begar*), and praedial exactions cannot be defended on economic or moral grounds, and must be abolished forthwith.

Retrospect and Forecast.—The kaleidoscopic changes which have taken place in the rural economy of India in the course of the past decades, have brought the country into the vortex of a mighty economic transi-

tion. These dismal changes, taking place with somewhat bewildering rapidity, have been fraught with struggles and sufferings of a magnitude unknown in the annals of any country. They have disrupted the industrial and social fabric of the whole Indian life, and have produced an array of problems of socio-economic nature which are an index to the present agrarian chaos and political unrest.

Serious difficulties, associated with agriculture, persist in the economic sphere, and the solution of outstanding economic problems would be largely helped or hindered by political circumstances. The faint rumblings of peasant class consciousness already audible in some parts of India, challenge the present regime. We see already the signs of peasant awakening in the growth of rural socio-political organizations such as the Mazdur Sabhas, Kisan Sanghs, the Peasant Unions, and active combinations against the absentee landlords. There has grown a universal contempt for the zamindar class which is accused of exploiting the poor and ignorant labourers by levying *abwabs* and extracting *begar* (forced labour). Agrarian crimes have taken the form of grain riots, strikes, arson, and bazar looting, and kisan-zamindar clashes have become things of everyday occurrence. This mass point of view is articulated in the country's social and political programmes under the present regime, and the whole structure of the village life is being moulded on new foundations of social and economic relativity.

The alarming growth of the landless and unspecified class of labourers, and the decline of actual tillers of the soil, has created a dangerous situation in rural society. There is no denying the fact that over large parts of India the number of persons on the land is much greater than the number required to cultivate it, and appreciably in excess of the number it can comfortably support. This floating population is increasing at a rapid rate, and is not only seriously disturbing the man-land ratio in