COMPARABILITY OF 1961 AND 1951 CENSUS ECONOMIC DATA

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COMPARISON of 1961 and 1951 census economic data yields conclusions, some of which defy credence. An increase of 29 per cent in male and 46 per cent in female workers as against a decennial growth of all males and females by 22 and 21 per cent respectively is indeed abnormal. Demographic, economic and cultural changes over the last decade can hardly offer adequate explanation. Accelerated population growth depresses the ratio of population in working ages in a closed population model. Economic planning could favour increase in employment but why it should be selective of female workers is difficult to understand. Cultural factors are the least sensitive of all, and changes such as greater literacy or urbanization would lower rather than promote worker participation among marginal groups. One is, therefore, tempted to conclude that a large part of the relative growth of working population is conceptual rather than real. If this conclusion be accepted, estimates of changes either in the size of working force or in its structure (since conceptual changes affect unequally persons in different industrial or occupational groups) become questionable. In what follows it is shown that while formal concepts have changed between 1951 and 1961, such changes are of little operational significance. The unexpected trends revealed by census statistics are, therefore, largely due to misinterpretation and faulty implementation of census instructions in some restricted regions in 1951, so that over large parts of the country the economic data of the two censuses are broadly comparable. There are, however, certain gaps in 1951 economic data which we seek to fill in order to make structural comparisons possible between the two dates.

1951 census adopted a tripartite economic classification of all persons into self-supporting persons, earning dependants and non-earning dependants. All persons who earned a regular income (in cash or kind) were either self-supporting persons or earning dependants, the distinction between the two being based on the adequacy of income for self-maintenance or otherwise. All others who had no claim to regular income were non-earning dependants. 1961 census classifies persons between two categories, namely workers and non-workers, distinguished by the pursuit of some 'productive work'. Broadly speaking, an equation may be established between the self-supporting persons plus earning dependants of 1951 and workers of