

THE PROBLEM OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

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THIS brief note attempts to summarize the main issues raised by the second reference to the Committee* and indicates some directions in which reorganization of existing schemes or the launching of the new ones could be examined. In the ultimate analysis the problem of surplus rural labour is supposed to be solved only by all sided economic development; the main features of this would be much greater efficiency of production in agriculture and the availability of diversified non-agricultural, particularly industrial, employment in such volume as to absorb much larger proportions of the rural population than at present in non-agricultural employment. The above has been generally widely accepted, but its full implications do not appear to be realized, in practice, in planning; in Indian conditions this involves much more than general progress towards industrialization. Existing under-employment in rural areas and the rate of growth of population in the country make it incumbent that early industrialization of the countryside should be attempted to as large an extent as possible and that all plans of industrialization should deliberately be oriented towards this end. This is necessary to avoid the difficulties and costs of large-scale migrations and to ensure the employment of large numbers at increasing levels of per capita output. In so far as the deliberate adoption or continuance of backward techniques hinders the process of development itself, the only way to reconcile adoption of advanced techniques with relatively large employment is to adopt the techniques for units of the smallest economic scale and to disperse them over the country. The increased costs involved in small-scale are, in this instance, compensated by the dispersion which reduces costs relation to movements of goods and the higher overheads involved in operation at large centres of population.

The above has a number of immediate implications for state plans. Firstly, that the planning of socio-economic overheads such as transport, power, water supply, credit and marketing facilities should be made very widely available. Secondly, it indicates undertaking large programmes of conservation and development of natural resources all over the country. This is necessary in order to give some base to the programme of industrialization. Thirdly, it emphasizes the urgent need to do nothing which will make impossible future developments in the direction of dispersed

* Agricultural Labour Committee of the Plan Consultative Committee of the Maharashtra State to which this note was submitted for discussion.