Abolition of Zamindari

TWO ALTERNATIVES

By

CHARAN SINGH, M.A., B.SC., LL.B., M.L.A.

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO HON'BLE THE MINISTER FOR REVENUE, UNITED PROVINCES

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PREFACE

The two main problems that face India to-day are : Industrialization of the country and re-organization of its agriculture. The co-ordination of small, medium and big industries *inter se* and their correlation to agriculture are other questions that call for application of constructive statesmanship and all that is best in our leadership.

As for agriculture on which three-fourths of the Indian people depend directly for their livelihood, it may be pointed out that land system lies at the root of all organization in this sphere. The existing system has cramped both men and crops. It has now few protagonists left in the country and has outgrown its utility, if ever it had any. It has stood for economic inequality and political reaction; it has to go.

It is going, but the question is—what should take its place ? The answer to this question depends on the type of civilization that we hope to develop. We may nationalize our land and collectivize agriculture. This means elimination of exploitation and of rule by landed aristocracy or oligarchy, but results in substitution of a society where individual initiative has little or no scope and where the place of the old privileged classes—the zemindars, financiers and the lawyers—is taken by a new class, viz., the managers of factories and farms and their superior and subordinate officials up and down the ladder. The kolhoz (collective farm) may lead to economic equality, but it does not necessarily lead to political equality; on the contrary, it engenders dictatorship. Collectivization—cum—mechanization means a big economic unit worked by big machines; it means corres-

pondingly so much less liberty to the worker on the land and his subordination to the urban industrial worker. In the Bolshevik scheme of things, the leading role is assigned to the proletariat which shall wield political power; the land worker or the peasant is to play only a secondary part.

Or, we may, instead of centralizing the ownership of the means of production in the hands of the State, make the worker the owner of his tools and the means of production with or upon which he works, i.e., make the tenant proprietor of his holding. Just as decentralization in the field of politics is our aim, so in the sphere of economic activities decentralization happens to be the correct ideal. Only one thread can run through all our life, political or economic. Panchayat of ancient memory shows us the way on the political or administrative side and the Chinese industrial co-operative on the side of manufacturing industry. Logically, the picture of the agricultural co-operative of independent peasant producers rises in our mind to fill the gap in agriculture. These three alone can form lasting bases of economic and political democracy. Then alone the worker or peasant can come into his own. Certainly a strong centre representing the reversionary interests of the community as a whole, carrying on certain essential functions and wielding residuary or exceptional powers to intervene and co-ordinate, is not inconsistent with the panchayat and the co-operatives. Not to digress; collectivization or mechanization of agriculture on big scale is by no means the last word in social evolution. We have to find a solution in consonance with the needs of our situation and with our traditions. I know the climate of opinion prevailing in certain intellectual circles of the country is not congenial to my views; in raising my voice against collectivization it seems I am wading against the stream—against fashion, but public interest demands that I should.

I shall not anticipate the contents of the book further.

It is unnecessary on my part to say that my views do not reflect those of the U. P. Government (to be precise, they have not yet formulated any); still it is better to say it than not.

I must state here unreservedly that for the most part of my account of the Soviet system I am indebted to Mr. Leonard E. Hubbard*. Mr. Hubbard writes from personal knowledge; he states facts and in his opinions he is neither a blind admirer of the U.S.S.R. nor its inveterate hater. He tows a middle line successfully, giving praise where due and assigning blame where necessary. My thanks are due to other writers also whose names and works have been mentioned at the proper place.

Lucknow CHARAN SINGH
October 3, 1946

*Economics of Social Agriculture, 1939.

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