

The partition of the sub-continent has handicapped the economic recovery of both India and Pakistan. Political differences fanned by the Communists into open warfare have cut food exports from Burma, Malaya and Indo-China. The prevalence of out-moded conditions both of labour and of land tenure have impeded improvements in agricultural production.

In India the individual holdings are so fragmented that it is difficult for the average farmer to raise enough to feed his own family. In Malaya 60 per cent of the farmers are small holders. In other parts of Asia the problem is more or less the same. Because the tenant does not want the major benefits of his efforts to pass to the absentee owner, the land remains without substantial improvement. In the absence of any small-credit facilities the farmer has had frequently to mortgage his holding, his future and that of his children to the unscrupulous money lender.

Without fundamental agrarian reform in Asia, therefore, it would be foolish to expect the full co-operation of the man who tills the soil in undertaking measures to step up food production.

A major factor impeding improvement is the use of primitive tools and techniques and the lack of knowledge of the science of agriculture. The steady growth of population in spite of the high mortality rate has increased the pressure on available resources of food. The lack of careful and well-coordinated planning, ignorance and illiteracy amongst the rural masses are further contributing factors that have made a solution of this basic problem of agricultural backwardness in Asia difficult.

As the dreadful facts of Asian poverty and misery have become more widely known in the West, some people, overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem, have taken refuge in the attitude that, on the one hand anything the West can or should do would be too little to have any real effect upon the problems of the area or, on the other, that making conditions of life more tolerable through increased supplies of food and better health and so cutting the mortality rate would merely increase the number of mouths to be fed and create an even greater problem.

Undernourishment and near starvation, however, do not reduce population. They actually cause over-population. Paradoxical as it may seem, if we were able to feed the hungry in India and other places the birth rate in those nations would begin to drop. China, India, Egypt and the Latin American countries, with the lowest nutritional levels in the world, have the highest rates of population growth.

The Asian countries are making great efforts to cope with the problems of economic development that confront them. But in tackling these problems the peoples of Asia are not willing to see their own culture lose its unique values and turn into a mere imitation of the West. It must not be forgotten that a major factor in the Asian acceptance of many Western ways has been paradoxically their desire to gain national independence in order to preserve their own cultural values even at the expense of economic advantage. Not all Asian leaders agree upon the value to their countries of the religious, cultural and political influences they have previously