

Perspective



Underdeveloped Areas, Food Supplies, and Social Reconstruction

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THE UNITED STATES is engaged in a great foreign aid effort designed to expand and diversify production in underdeveloped areas including the nine new nations of south and southeast Asia. These attained independence since World War II and contain more than a third of the world's population. This job, hardly more than begun, has been in operation in most of these nations only for the past three years.

What happens in this great underdeveloped part of the world in the next decade or two will have a significant influence in determining how we will live and the kind of economy and living our children and their children will experience. The agriculture of this part of the world is sick, and the predominantly rural economies are full of unrest. In some of these nations, practically nine out of every 10 workers in the labor force are engaged in agriculture—in producing the food and fiber necessary to feed and clothe the population. Poverty, disease, and ignorance abound.

The rural areas of these underdeveloped nations are characterized by 10 principal conditions: (1) small, inadequate farms, (2) antiquated farming methods, (3) lack of adequate reasonable cost credit, (4) extensive unemployment and underemployment, (5) inadequate family incomes to support satisfactory living standards, (6) high farm tenancy, (7) decreasing soil fertility, (8) malnutrition and resulting poor health and low productivity, (9) lack of local self-government, and (10) lack of various essential community services, particularly roads, water supply, schools, medical services, reading centers, recreation, and marketing facilities.

The program which will correct these conditions must necessarily emphasize increased output to make improved living levels possible. It is estimated that rice yields in the Philippines, for example, can be doubled by the use of commercial fertilizers, by supplemental water supplies from controlled irrigation systems,

either gravity or pump, and by the use of improved varieties of seed.

This increased food production objective is laudable but, in and of itself, is not sufficient to cure the problems of these areas. In fact, alone, these increases might actually result in creating a more intense and dangerous unrest and dissatisfaction on the part of the masses. Unless the increased net returns from expanded production go principally to low income groups—tenants and laborers—the aid program will fail to achieve its objective of strengthening the economies of the participating countries, establishing peace and order, and creating strong, vigorous allies.

Political and social institutions must be changed to establish adequate farm credit at reasonable interest rates, strong cooperative marketing associations, effective agricultural research and extension services, land tenure reforms, free collective bargaining by labor unions, and arbitration of management-labor disputes.

For the United States to encourage institutional changes to improve the lot of the masses is not unnecessary or improper meddling. Progress along these lines can be faster in some countries than in others, but a very strong emphasis on these aspects should be incorporated in the program of each mission.

In the Philippines, for example, basic social and economic reforms are a part of our program, including the establishment of a national cooperative credit administration, a national agricultural extension service, minimum wage legislation, and a collective bargaining law for labor unions. Certain land reforms are in progress. The psychological and moral inspirations of these reforms are amazing and constitute a major force in breaking the backbone of the "huk" or dissident movement. They are evidence of the desirability and necessity of making social reconstruction an important part of our aid effort.