

*The Egyptian Agrarian Reform 1952-1962* by Gabriel S. Saab. London: Oxford University Press, 1967. Pp. 236.

The revolutionary regime instituted land reforms in Egypt shortly after its inception in 1952. This book is a description of various measures adopted and the success achieved in agrarian reform in Egypt during 1952-1962.

In Egypt the objectives of the land redistribution were: (1) satisfaction of land-hunger of the landless rural community; (2) improvement in the rural living condition; and (3) expansion of agricultural productive capacity. The fixation of 200 feddans as a maximum land holding per person, expropriation of land in excess of that limit, and the subsequent distribution of land to landless rural people on instalment payments went a long way in satisfying the land-hunger in the sparsely-populated delta regions. In the densely-populated regions, although land-hunger of the landless rural community was not satisfied, the fixation of three years as a minimum period for farm lease and prohibition of eviction of tenants and share-croppers during the first years after the Agrarian Reform alleviated the position of the tenants and the share-croppers.

There was a slight improvement in the living conditions of rural families as a result of income transfer from landlords to the peasants in the shape of lower instalments or rents for the holdings. This income transfer was, however, a transfer of consumption since, as the author maintains, the landlords indulged in unproductive expenditure or land accumulation. The author, therefore, conjectures that the balance between saving and consumption in the rural sector was not disturbed in spite of the increases in consumption of the small farmers. But, this can happen only if the marginal propensity to consume is same for the landlords and the farmers. The author's contention that farmers increased their consumption of food, clothes and shoes and his observation regarding a rise in rural marriage rate, show that the farmer's marginal propensity to consume was higher than the landlord's. If so, the saving rate in the rural areas must have gone down.

The objective of expanding agricultural productivity was far from being realized. This failure of the agricultural reforms is attributed to lack of incentives to long-term investment and to an intensification and diversification of

production. The provision of credit facilities, the reduction of indebtedness to money-lenders, and the greater affluence of the farm operators stimulated short-term farm investment, as they were now in a better position to increase outlay on seeds, fertilizers, and insecticides. But no investments in long-term projects such as fruit production were made. According to the author's scheme, "fruit and vegetable and livestock production could have increased farmer's income and transformed his economic and social conditions as effectively as industrialization". The reader is left in the dark as to why the farmers did not shift from foodgrains to fruit, vegetable and livestock production. The only "explanation" for this state of affairs that the author gives is the resentment of senior Agrarian Reform officials on some schemes of diversification of agricultural production because they feared that such diversification might involve a reduction of acreage under foodgrain and thus intensify the problem of rising cost of maize in rural areas. The self-sustained process of economic growth was hampered because of the government's "reluctance to envisage the emergence of any spontaneous constructive initiative in the redistributed states" and "insistence on itself implementing development projects designed to benefit the small holders". The author seems to forget that in a subsistence economy, the shift from grain production to livestock, fruit and vegetable growing is governed not by the realized rates of return but the opportunity cost of obtaining grain. Moreover, livestock and orchards have gestation periods involving significant capital investment. So, even though banana, mango and citrus orchards or vineyards were giving annual "net income two or three times higher than that obtained per unit of land sown with traditional crops", the lack of capital would hamper the shift from traditional crops to fruit growing. Thus it is not the lack of stimulants but the lack of capital which hampers self-sustained economic growth in agrarian economies.

Although the Land Reform Law seemed truly revolutionary to the Egyptian rural community, the author feels that the authorities abstained from enacting sweeping measures which would have raised still further the status of tenancy and share-cropping. Long-term security and protection of tenants and share-croppers was still lacking in 1960-61 because of the government efforts to reconcile its desire to provide reasonable security to tenants and share-croppers with political "realities". The minimum of protection and security provided to tenants and share-croppers is, however, thought to have encouraged them to invest and to make better use of land they cultivated.

Dr. Saab's book lacks the analytic and theoretical approach to the subject but is an interesting piece of descriptive and factual work. For those who wish to know how agrarian reforms were handled in Egypt, it is a book of clear description.

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