CHAPTER XV

CONCLUSION

One may be tempted to accept the popular belief held by the Neo-Malthusians. Their findings may be true in the light of the circumstances, and the facts available at the time, they did the pioneering work in the field of agricultural economics. But a study of this work would lead us to some different conclusions, which have been deduced from an overwhelming volume of evidence.

The position, briefly, is that up to 1937, when Burma was a part of India, the country had a balanced economy with regard to foodgrains. Since Burma, primarily a rice-producing area, formed one political unit with India, recommendations were made by the Crop Planning Sub Committee not to bring any more land under rice in India. The Indian market as a whole provided an outlet for the surplus Burma rice. There was otherwise no such thing as the inability of the country to produce her own requirements.

It would be interesting to note that the position has not changed even today. Burma is unable to find markets for her surplus rice. The Burmese Premier, U. Nu, addressing the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, thanked India for having agreed to purchase 90,000 tons of 1 Burmese rice in 1954 when a market could not be found for it. She has an annual surplus of the order of 2 million tons of rice even today. 2 India has also re-emerged as an exporter of rice after more than a decade, her rice exports during the year 1955 being 2.65 lakh tons.

1. The Hindustan Times, September 27, 1955.
2. Ibid., November 5, 1955.
The drying up of India's wheat exports was due to glut of that commodity in the world market and her inability to meet world competition. Just like rice, the world market today presents practically the same pattern after a lapse of some 20 years when for every one bushel of wheat required, there are nearly two bushels available. The world's annual exportable supplies at present total 1600 million bushels, while the total demand is about 800 to 900 million bushels.

Under the circumstances, the question of the demand outstripping the supply in the pre-war period or of imports being the result of any food problem in the country would not arise. In fact, the agriculturist in India was not finding his occupation gainful and there were a number of tenants who abandoned their lands because of their inability to pay the rent. The number of such abandonments in 1931 in the then United Provinces alone was reported to be 71,430. The Bengal Committee on Irrigation in 1930 also confirmed that lands there were going out of cultivation.

The problem changed its complexion entirely in the next ten years from 1937 to 1947. Immediately after the separation of Burma there was a fall in the rice imports from that country, perhaps, in response to popular opinion in India. With the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, the situation underwent a further change. The Burma market was cut off from India when Japan entered the war in 1942. Pressure on food had increased tremendously. In spite of all this, the country was a net exporter of foodgrains for the period 1942-43 to 1944-45, and a net exporter of rice in 1942-43. The food situation in the country did not worsen even then. The Bengal famine was there no doubt but the blame for it also lay elsewhere. Control over distribution was imposed merely for the benefit of non-producers and in order to make up for the deficiency in the

1. India, October 26, 1955.
normal channels of trade which had been dislocated as a result of abnormal political and economic conditions in the country.

The introduction of rationing as a measure of emergency created fresh problems. Imports were necessitated to make up for the "gaps" between the Government's rationing commitments and procurement of foodgrains at home. The result was a complete shift in the food trade of the country in the sense that India emerged as a net importer of wheat—a commodity she had been exporting before.

The marketable surplus during this period could not reach the genuine non-producers because of the temporary impediments which were hindering its trade. Imports thus became necessary as no other solution of the problem could be found. The question before the country during this period was, therefore, one of restoring trade in food through normal channels.

With the cessation of hostilities in 1945, it was expected that normal conditions would return. But there followed the partition of the country displacing hundreds and thousands of people. Rationing had to be extended which resulted in aggravating the pre-partition malady so that procurements remained unrelated to production and imports in increasing quantities were resorted to, to fill the widening "gaps". Production also remained depressed due to the lack of necessary incentives to the cultivators.

A vicious circle was thus formed. Even during the dark period of the country's food history, when imports touched the peak figure of over four million tons in 1951, ever increasing imports had no relation to the actual pressure of population on food. A change in the food policy was thus clearly necessary to solve the country's food problem.
In June, 1962, this long awaited change in the food policy was announced. Partial decontrol was introduced in Madras - a State which was admittedly deficient in food. The experiment proved successful and the authorities were encouraged to try it throughout the country. Nature also aided in this experiment and bumper crops were reaped. The forces of supply and demand once again took a hand in regulating the trade in food, with the result that there is no more talk of food shortages in the country but of disposing of its surpluses and stabilising the food prices.

If the Indian Union, with the food granaries of Burma and Pakistan having been taken away from her, can stand on her own resources today and that too, on a higher level of consumption, one wonders how far we are justified in depicting her as a country where the Malthusian theory can apply. In fact never in its food history have the Malthusian checks come into play as a result of food deficiencies. This single fact is sufficient to refute the long cherished theory of Neo-Malthusian that there is pressure of population on food in India. The chief drawback of Neo-Malthusians in the past has been their dependence on the unreliable agricultural data which even today do not give us a correct position of the real food situation.

As for the future, the study indicates that there are tremendous possibilities of increasing the food potential of the country. It can be increased by about 96 per cent under the present cropping pattern and that, too, without introducing any far-reaching changes in the agricultural economy. The possibility of increasing it still further by special measures is again there. This in a way exposes the appalling condition in which our agriculture has remained so far.

The continued miserable condition of the masses here forced them in the past into a pessimistic attitude which damped their initiative. An optimistic state of mind is, therefore, the first thing to be created.
Our agriculture in the past suffered because the cultivator had rather limited access to the facilities, and we failed to look into the problem from such a realistic point of view. We neglected both our villages and those who dwell in them. For that very reason Sir Daniel Hamilton was forced to say that most of India's villages — her foundation stones — were as shaky and unsound as they could be.

This change in the outlook of rural India is now being brought about through the schemes of Community Projects and the National Extension Service which have been introduced throughout India. Our cultivator, whose skill in farming has otherwise been recognised, is being made familiar with improved methods of agriculture. A few of our progressive farmers by using these latest methods have already beaten world records in raising some of the crops. There is no reason why, with proper guidance, our cultivators should not be able to get the best yields from the land.

Dr. Yates of Rothamstead Experiment Station writing on Fertilising for Higher Yields observes: "There is sufficient evidence to indicate that where water-supplies are adequate, the responses in countries like India and China to the use of fertilizers on food crops will be of the same order as, or greater than, those obtained in Great Britain and the rest of western Europe."

In the best land yields only one crop, while in most parts of India two are grown and even three are possible. In China, as against this, the number of crops grown is four. With all these handicaps West is not yet said to have any food problem in the Malthusian sense. One wonders why this problem should at all be posed in the East with all its favourable circumstances.

3. Dr. Mileox, op.cit., p. 207.
It has also been explained that, other things remaining the same, the future rate of population growth in the country may remain almost the same, as in the last decade. There is every possibility of this rate showing a downward trend in the future. The consumption of cereals is the maximum at present, and with an improvement in the standard of living the rate of consumption may come down as envisaged under Engel's Law.

This study thus brings us to the happy conclusion that the Malthusian theories on food and population have never figured in India and that there is no possibility of their coming into operation in the near future. The Law of Dynamic Balance reads,

"In the same universe, within one and the same cycle, other things remaining the same, after the equilibrium density, every addition to the population brings a decreasing increase into it."

Also because of the fact that the Law of Diminishing Returns to agriculture is not yet threatening India, we can look forward to our future with confidence.

This does not mean that the supply of food will ever remain inexhaustible or its production will not be regulated with a view to raising the standard of living. The production of food, as that of any other agricultural or industrial product, will have to conform to objectives of a planned economy and thus help in the realization of our dream of a better and happier India.

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1. Dr. Nader, *Quot.* p. 47.