AGRICULTURAL CONDITIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF RURAL POLICY IN GREECE.

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The case of Greece affords a striking example of what can be achieved by a country with small potentialities and restricted means, toiling under unfavourable conditions, but utilizing even the slightest possibilities, with a view to building up its economy on a sound basis.

On the other hand, the experience acquired during the last thirty years by the application of an economy more or less planned beforehand may provide some interesting criteria concerning the different measures of rural policy.

The rural economy of Greece has been of very great importance for her general economy and social welfare. Suffice it to say that over three-fifths of the population have been living on agriculture, that the agricultural products exported amounted to nine-tenths of the exports of Greece and that agriculture has been contributing to the national income by 35 to 40 per cent. against 15 per cent. to 60 per cent. of industry (and this mostly rural) and crafts, 10 per cent. to 11 per cent. of commerce (again mainly of agricultural products), and less than 1 per cent. of mining industry.

Greece is situated in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. The main block of land is a peninsula, not only surrounded by water on three sides but deeply penetrated by it as well. This body is enclosed in a system of islands.

The total area of Greece is about 130,000 square kilometres. The population is about 8,000,000. There is therefore a density of population of about 60 inhabitants per square kilometre. But if we compare the population to the cultivated area of the land, which is hardly one-fifth of the total area, then we have a density of over 300 inhabitants per square kilometre, which is very high indeed, and still more so for a country that is predominantly agricultural.

About four-fifths of the country is mountainous. Between the mountains we have a number of basins. These increase in number from north to south, while their area decreases in the same direction. We also have several valleys and a few plains. The plains in the south are very limited, both as regards their number and area. The three biggest plains, those of Thessalonika in Central Macedonia, of Serres-Drama in Eastern Macedonia, and of Thessaly, are all in the north.

The climate of Greece can roughly be described as being divided into three main zones. The central part, extending from north to south, is continental. The coast belt is in principle Mediterranean, i.e., of mild climate with winter rainfall. But the latter can be subdivided into two—that of the westerly part, which is characterized by a high rainfall, often exceeding 60 inches a year, and that of the eastern part, which is dry, the rainfall varying from 10 to 20 inches a year. Apart from these differences, there is also a notable change of humidity and temperature as one goes from north to south or vice versa, the north being wetter and cooler.

The rivers contain a relatively small quantity of water, owing, on the one hand, to the permeability of their beds, and, on the other, to the high degree of evaporation.

The quality of the soil, agriculturally, varies from place to place. We can say, however, that the soil of the plains is rather fertile, that in the basins is of medium fertility—being mainly the well-known "terra rossa"—and that left on the mountains can hardly bear any grass, shrubs or forest trees. The existing vegetation in the highlands is, as a rule, scattered in places where climatic conditions and erosion still permit it.

The outstanding characteristic of the soils of Greece is insufficiency of inorganic matter and phosphorus. The natural vegetation varies widely within the country on account of the vast differences in climate, configuration of the surface of the soil, its location and nature, and such other conditions on which vegetation depends. Yet it is possible to summarise it in the following: On the coasts it is that of the Mediterranean. There are vines (for the production of fruit, currants and wines), olive trees, citrus, apricots, pomegranates, fig trees, carob trees, mulberries, etc. The plains are cultivated with field crops and mainly with cereals (wheat, barley, oats, maize, sorghums, cotton, sesame, tritolioms, melons, vegetables and other agricultural products. The basins, where the "terra rossa" is the general rule, field crops are mainly cultivated. Among them maize is of the greatest importance. It may well be said that maize is in a large measure responsible for the maintenance of the population of these districts, because it is a plant very well adapted to these climatic, soil and other conditions. The slopes are, as a general rule, cultivated with vines, trees and drought-resistant field crops, among which tobacco is of the highest economic value.

The mountains, which occupy the greatest part of the central belt, are mainly used for grazing and, in some cases, they bear some forests. In places where conditions permit, some field crops and particularly rye, are also grown.

The succession of vegetation is the following: In the higher parts it generally consists of Fagetum. This is followed by the Pictetum (Balkan spruce). Further down we find the Quercetum. This is succeeded by the Castanetum, and at the lower parts—as far down as the level of the sea—are the broad-leaved perennials and the Pinus halepensis zone.

Twenty per cent. of the entire area of Greece is cultivated, 15 per cent. is covered by forests, and 65 per cent. is more or less grazed.

The cattle raised in Greece before the war amounted to about 1,000,000 head. They were mainly used for draught and for milking purposes. Horses, mules and donkeys were also used for traction and transportation. These numbered altogether approximately 300,000 head. Yet Greece is much more a sheep than a cattle or a horse country. The sheep have since time immemorial been used principally for milking in conjunction with the production of meat (lamb and mutton). Their number amounted to about 8,500,000. Goats are also raised for similar purposes. They numbered about 500,000 head at the time before the war. In addition, there were raised in Greece about 600,000 to 600,000 pigs.

The most important rural industries were those of wine and spirits, oil and soaps, flour milling, dairying, and textile and silk industries. In this connection we may also mention tobacco and currant curing, fruit and vegetable preserving.

The rural economy of Greece as a whole is characterized by exiguity of land and capital, excess of labour and climatic difficulties, and erosion handicaps. As regards the size of the farming units, small holdings have more or less been the general rule in the past. Farming on a large scale was practically non-existent at the beginning of the war. The size of the holdings usually varied from 2 to 40 acres, the most common being the four to six-acre farming units. These small farms were as a general rule intensively cultivated, and the intensity was effected by excess of skilled labour, as there has always been a scarcity of capital in the country.

The devotion of the Greek agriculturist to his land and his industry and perseverance are proverbial. Most noteworthy is also his skilfulness in coping with adverse climatic, soil and other agricultural conditions, notwithstanding the deficiency or complete lack of vocational education. One simple example may suffice to give you a picture of the situation. It is no uncommon occurrence on the rocky slopes of the country to come upon a peasant spending his whole day on the task of digging a pit or two in the hard rock, and then carrying soil, often on his shoulder, in a bag to mix it in the pits with the fragments of the rock extracted and plant one or two olive trees, which will only bear fruit in the lifetime of his son or even his grandson.

Notwithstanding the existing difficulties, the yields per surface unit for most of the products have generally been a little higher than those of the Union of South Africa. Among the exceptions we have to make special mention of the tobacco, for in
Greece it gives rather small quantities per acre, but its quality is excellent indeed. It has a wonderful aroma, an exceptionally good taste and above all, a very small percentage of nicotine (from about one-third to one-twentieth of the other tobaccos). Thus to make up for the smallness of the yield, Greek tobaccos can be sold so dear that it usually pays to grow them.

These have been the main lines of our economy. As regards the nature of the agricultural production of Greece, I may add that from the most ancient times up to now there has been a specialization in those plants and animals which are particularly favoured by local conditions, both physical and social (such as oil, wines, currants and, in modern times, tobacco). This implied the necessity of importing considerable quantities of commodities of prime necessity (such as cereals, sugar, etc.), which accounts for the fact that agricultural products make up 50 per cent. of the imports of Greece.

Let us see now the measures of rural policy that have been taken in different times in Greece, since the historic period and even before. Many politicians, aristocrats, even scientists and philosophers, had their own farms, and when they could spare a few days or even hours they rushed out into the country. A great and wide interest was taken in agriculture, the rural policy being followed by the moral and political means available. Agricultural insurance due both to defective planning and to the lack of capital followed the compulsory experiment can also give decreased, diseases such as malaria and otherlike causes and the policy was that of the colonization and settlement of the refugees. This was to make up, in away, for the imperfections and the lack of capital that from the most ancient times up to now there has been a pronounced exiguity of land and lack of capital.

The case of this country may serve, I think, as an example for many others, because the planning and application on such a large scale of a modern rural policy, comprising such a wide colonization, may be considered as one of the greatest experiments that have ever been made in this field. The results of this compulsory experiment can also give an idea of the possibilities of better achievements in cases where things can be studied leisurely beforehand and the applications of the plans can be carried out under better conditions. In that case, the imperfections and faults due both to defective planning and deficient application can evidently be considerably reduced.

The VICE-PRESIDENT, in opening the paper for discussion, said that Prof. Boyazoglu, who hailed from Greece, had held many positions of great distinction, and he was credited with a large number of scientific works. He had to flee from his country and was at present Director of Rural Economics at the Witwatersand University. He hoped that his stay in our country would be a pleasant one.

Dr. HEDLEY said that to settle more than 1,500,000 people in Greece was indeed a great achievement. After this war an influx of very many people interested in agriculture would take place in this country. He hoped Prof. Boyazoglu would be able to convey to the Government of this country a scheme which would provide homes and futures for these worthy men and their families.

Prof. BOYAZOGLU replied that the Government fully appreciated the position. He had been appointed to the chair of Rural Economics with this object in view.

Mr. MOBERLY said that Prof. Boyazoglu must have been struck by the tremendous differences in almost every aspect between this country and Greece. The two countries, however, had some things in common. In both of them there were areas of low rainfall, badly distributed, and soil of poor fertility with the inevitable consequence of soil erosion. He hoped that this was one of the many things about which Prof. Boyazoglu would be able to give us valuable advice. Soil erosion was so serious today that the individual could no longer be expected to bear the cost of combating it. Such work must be a national responsibility.

Mr. DODDS said that Prof. Boyazoglu was very enthusiastic about his work and had a remarkable penetration and grasp of the essential facts of a new set of conditions. He hoped that while the Professor was in Natal the sugar industry would take full advantage of his talents in getting him to draw up an economic survey of the industry.