

# NATURE

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## COLONIAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE

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THE full statement which the Minister of Food, Mr. Strachey, made in the House of Commons on the East African groundnut scheme on March 14 did not dispose of some of the criticism; on the whole, however, with some assistance from the Opposition, he succeeded in putting the scheme in its true perspective in terms of Colonial development. The public has hitherto regarded the scheme as essentially one to produce oils and fats, for which the fact that the Minister of Food was made responsible for the scheme was undoubtedly a contributory factor. The scale of the scheme is now to be reduced; but Mr. Strachey rightly refused to regard the production of oils and fats as unimportant. The world need of fat supplies is as great as ever, and whether or not the revised scheme will give, as is claimed, the same yield of oils and fats, the importance of that aspect remains, even if it is secondary to the main purpose of Colonial welfare and development.

Mr. Strachey stated that the acreage to be cleared in the three East African areas is to be reduced from three and a half to two millions, and that the Overseas Food Corporation estimates that, working to the ten-year plan, the new acreage will give the 600,000 tons of oil-seeds originally forecast. A higher yield would be made possible by including sunflowers in the rotation of crops. Development of the Kangwa area, where practically all the clearance has so far been done, will be restricted in favour of the more promising western area of Urambo and the southern area of Tanganyika; but Mr. Strachey advanced no evidence that better preparation has been made in the southern area, where admittedly no clearing has yet been done.

On such technical points there was surprisingly little comment in the debate in the House of Commons; but such factors will have a very important bearing on the expenditure involved. It was admitted by Mr. Strachey that the cost of the scheme may well be double the original estimate. That estimate may be accepted; but there will be less confidence in his estimate that revenue will also be doubled. Inflation has greatly exaggerated the world shortage of fats, and informed opinion is at least doubtful whether the price of groundnuts is likely to remain at the level of £51 a ton which the Ministry of Food is at present paying in its long-term contract for main supplies from West Africa. That price represents an increase of £6 a ton on the 1947-48 price, and, to say the least, it is unreasonable to expect the British taxpayer to permit the Minister of Food indefinitely to pay an inflated price in long-term contracts and ignore any fall in world prices.

Nevertheless, whatever the financial shortcomings of the scheme, Britain is now committed too deeply for it to be abandoned unless it is proved to be impracticable agriculturally. The best opinion is against so pessimistic a conclusion, and the reforms announced by Mr. Strachey appear to be sound. The revised plan will, however, require vastly improved methods of organisation if it is to succeed,

and Mr. Strachey did not conceal the problems which are presented by such matters as stores, tractors and other equipment, and port and railway extensions. Much careful planning and preparation are needed, for these matters are not without bearing on other economic developments, as Mr. Strachey indicated in relation to the railway developments in the Lukeledi valley, which are to provide an outlet to the new port of Mikidani from the groundnut area.

The scientific and technical factors were chiefly stressed in the debate by Mr. Henderson Stewart, who rightly directed attention to the time required to be certain we had found the right solution to problems of cultivation, agricultural implements, the rotation of crops, fertilizers and so on. This speech drew from Mr. Strachey a repudiation of any suggestion that the Government had attempted to drive the Corporation or the managing agency at an unreasonable speed. But it must be recognized that long-term and short-term requirements are not always compatible; the Government has tended hitherto to overstress the short-term aspect of the scheme, and its reluctance to provide a report or 'white paper' in advance of the debate has not made it easy to correct that impression.

Two things at least the debate has done. From all sides of the House, members joined with Mr. Strachey in commending the personal devotion and enterprise of the Europeans working on the scheme in East Africa, and the debate should dispel any lingering ideas that criticism of the scheme should be levelled against those responsible for its execution in Africa. It was, indeed, suggested that the proportion of Europeans to Africans engaged in the scheme is considerably higher than originally envisaged—one to eleven instead of one to every thirty or forty Africans—and concentration of the Europeans on scientific, technical and supervisory tasks to the maximum extent should reduce the administrative and overhead costs. Mr. Frederic Harris also suggested that splitting up the 30,000-acre units into units of 5,000–8,000 acres for private development was a sensible proposition which should also be tried.

Above all, the debate brought out the welfare aspect of the scheme. The Minister of Food spoke of the benefit which would accrue to the African peoples once the project is fully under way; already, he said, there is evidence of benefit to health through the improved nutrition of those participating in the scheme. He might, indeed, have said more about the difficulties of maintaining a steady labour force and the measures that will be required to overcome them. Nevertheless, it can no longer be pretended that the scheme is one of exploitation of African resources for the benefit of the rest of the world; it is essentially a long-term development scheme in which the primary purpose is Colonial welfare, while simultaneously serving the world's needs for oils and fats.

The welfare aspect must, indeed, be kept in mind if the economic aspects of the scheme are to be considered fairly, whether from the point of view of the Colonial people or of the British taxpayer. The debate is one, therefore, to be considered in the context of a subsequent debate on Colonial policy

and administration in the House of Lords on April 13. Against this background, too, should be reviewed the recent reports from the Colonial Office on the production of fish in the Colonial Empire and on the work of the Colonial Primary Products Committee. A large part of the latter report, in fact, deals with vegetable oils and oil-seeds and with essential oils, and in introducing the report the Committee refers particularly to the bearing of price, particularly on the production of oil-seeds.

Before the Second World War, the primary producer was often penalized by fluctuations in commodity prices on world markets. Marketing schemes established during the War for various Colonial products often paid producers a fixed price for the whole season, and producers of annual crops were guaranteed prices for their produce before the planting season began. Since the assurance of a reasonable price tends to encourage the planting of annual crops, continuance of such schemes, suitably modified, should increase production; and the system has the further advantage that central organisation can accumulate funds at times of high prices and subsidize prices paid to producers when world prices fall, thus cushioning producers to some extent. The Colonial Primary Products Committee in its report welcomes the policy of long-term contracts pursued by the Government, particularly for tree crops and where capital development is involved. Quoting the text of the statement made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on September 17, 1948, in regard to such guarantees for Colonial produce, it suggests that similar considerations might govern the conclusion of contracts for commodities bought by other control buying organisations or associations of users or manufacturers.

It does not appear, however, that Mr. Strachey has yet fully appreciated the implications of the Chancellor's observations on price, or on the imperative need for establishing beyond question community of interest and co-operation if misunderstandings are not to arise and justice is to be done between the primary producer and the ordinary citizen of Great Britain. Moreover, as the Colonial Primary Products Committee has noted, where a crop such as oil-seeds in West Africa is largely a cash crop, high prices will not result in increased production if there is a shortage of consumer goods. Lord Swinton did well to explain, in opening the House of Lords debate, the interdependence of economic prosperity, health and practical education in the Colonial areas, and the way in which the needs of the Colonial peoples are linked with the needs of people in Britain.

The commodity studies presented in this second report from the Colonial Primary Products Committee are reviewed elsewhere (p. 898 of this issue); it is sufficient here to note that the Committee takes the view that semi-mechanized methods for the cultivation of such crops as groundnuts and sunflowers are unlikely to be introduced rapidly into West African territories. It will probably be necessary to start with pilot schemes, the results of which must be available before production can begin on a larger scale. Similarly, experiments on a large scale over a period of years will be required before any

sound conclusions can be reached as to the possibilities for groundnuts in British Honduras.

The improvement of material conditions must clearly come first, and the debate in the House of Lords brought out the need for a coherent and consistent policy in Colonial administration. Without that, neither British nor Colonial scientific workers, even with the help of American technical experts, will secure the physical development of mineral wealth or other natural resources, water supplies or transport, or the improvement in health and social welfare which could follow the application of advances in knowledge of nutrition, preventive and curative medicine and the like. There must be a balance between such measures and those taken in the economic and political field.

Lord Swinton, at the outset of his speech, enunciated five principles which should guide British Colonial policy and the planning of Colonial development. First, we are trustees for the whole of the Colonial peoples and not for a section or a minority. Secondly, the primary need of all these peoples is improved health and well-being, and the true liberty of the individual to enjoy them. Thirdly, economic and social progress depends on co-operation between the European and the indigenous populations. Fourthly, the ultimate goal is self-government, the evolution of which may be infinitely varied; and last, that the prerequisite of self-government is the capacity to govern.

These five points were accepted on behalf of the Government both by Lord Pethick-Lawrence and by Lord Listowel. Nevertheless, there remains some doubt whether in practice the tempo of political development is quite in keeping with the first and last points, and whether there is not danger that too much regard is being had to the demands of a more vociferous minority. As Lord Swinton said in amplifying his last point, without effective government there can be no freedom for the individual, and while all suffer, the ordinary man suffers most.

It will not, and cannot, be easy to arrive at a balance which will satisfy all, and the balance must be struck for each territory in the light of the circumstances which prevail there. The Colonial Office tends to be over-cautious and, although sections of the local population may be over-eager or over-sensitive in the matter of political independence, the Colonial Office must none the less show more imagination and the leadership which inspires confidence. The points made by Lord Swinton provide some guide in working out a practical policy, particularly when three important points stressed by Lord Tweedsmuir are also remembered. Political independence can only come about when economic independence has been secured, and only then when the capacity for government exists. In all African Colonies and in many others, the Colonial peoples cannot make headway at present without European leadership, and European capital and technical help; and that help will count for nothing unless we can take some Colonial peoples along with us in partnership. The second of those points was strikingly emphasized by Dr. C. H. Northcott in his recent report on the efficiency of African labour.

Hence Great Britain has still a great part to play in the future of the Colonial peoples, and it is important that at the centre there should be clear and constructive leadership, and that malicious criticism frequently levelled against Great Britain and other Colonial Powers should receive a positive answer. The United Nations Scientific Conference on the Conservation and Utilization of Resources meeting this summer at Lake Success will provide emphatic evidence of the British contribution to Colonial welfare. An even more important contribution of the Conference may be in furthering both the indispensable co-operation between the Colonial Powers and the Colonial peoples, and in shaping regional and other forms of co-operation between the Colonial Powers which will enable scientific and technical advances to be brought most swiftly and effectively to bear on the economic and social problems of the Colonial peoples. Nothing in Lord Listowel's reply was more welcome than his recognition that education is the vital social service, and that teaching people to govern themselves in local communities provides the real basis of political advance.

## PROBLEMS OF ORGANIC FORM

### Organic Form and Related Biological Problems

By S. J. Holmes. Pp. vii+169. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; London: Cambridge University Press, 1948.) 27s. 6d. net.

THE title of this book is aptly descriptive of the contents. In a series of related essays, the author has discussed the factors which determine form in living organisms. It is difficult to do justice to a work such as this in a short review, for the author has succeeded in saying so much, and that with an illuminating perspicacity, that is cogent in each of his condensed chapters. These are concerned with an inquiry into the problem of organic form, the functional aspect of morphogenetic processes, competition as an integrative factor in morphogenesis, differentiation, chemical equilibrium and organic integration, and so on. On each theme, the leading ideas that at one time or another have been held are clearly set out, and an attempt is made to find a sure way to explanations of a valid kind. In these discussions the author's fairness and balance are a striking feature; his contribution is patently the result of long and deep pondering of central themes in contemporary biology.

In every normal embryonic development the impressive facts are the formation and divergent development of the component parts or organs, their regular appearance in their proper positions, and the regulation and harmony of morphogenetic processes that result in the characteristic development of the whole. How are these phenomena to be explained, and what kinds of explanation are likely to prove acceptable to the contemporary biologist? On such problems much new light is shed by the analytical approach adopted in this work. In the author's view, morphogenetic and related processes can be referred to biochemical and biophysical processes which are ultimately gene-controlled, that is to say, an epigenetic and mechanistic view of formative processes