

Agriculture

Thinking in socially relevant terms

"The problems of unemployment and self-sufficiency in food cannot be solved without a major transformation of the agricultural sector. This transformation in turn cannot be effectively carried out without four cardinal commitments in national policy. The first is the mobilization and participation of the people for changes in the agrarian sector through political leadership at the highest levels. Secondly, the larger fiscal and monetary policies must be aimed at supporting the indigenous agricultural base. Thirdly, the land resources of the country must be under social control and managed and developed for the benefit of those actively engaged in farming the land. Finally, the agricultural systems must be so designed as to make maximum use of material and human resources that are available within the country.

In the sphere of land policy the implementation of the Land Reform Law, No. 1 of 1972, and the amending Law, No. 35 of 1975, are major steps towards the social control of land, which is the most important resource base in an agricultural country. We have moved irrevocably forwards in the transformation of the agrarian situation in Sri Lanka. The fact that this change was brought about without a drop of blood being shed is a great tribute to the discipline and understanding of the people of this country.

The Agricultural Productivity Law has placed the responsibility for planning and implementation of agricultural programmes squarely on the rural farming community. This transfer of the decision making processes to the people directly engaged in farming and the gradual termination of bureaucratic control should go a long way towards obtaining full farmer participation in development and also towards opening the door for a release of the creative potentialities that hitherto have been inhibited and dormant in the rural areas.

Policies, laws and institutions alone, however, cannot solve the problems of agricultural production. The major task ahead of us is one of utilizing our land, water and other natural resources in the most pro-

ductive manner possible and in reaching levels of productivity that would not only be adequate to meet the needs of the nation but would also provide increasing employment and higher standards of living in the rural areas. In achieving these objectives it is axiomatic that the application of science, in all its varied disciplines and technologies, is an integral and indispensable component. However, it would appear to me, that the development of science and

The obstacles retarding our economic progress have continued to be the concern of local scientists in both the social and physical sciences. One measure advocated has been to transform our entire approach to such problems; and for such a transformation in our approach there needs to be change in the traditional thinking. The 'Economic Review' in pursuing its object of promoting a knowledge of and an interest in the economic development process has consistently given prominence to this viewpoint. The Minister of Agriculture and Lands, Mr. Hector Kobbekaduwa, who has steered through legislative measures that have done much towards transforming the country's economy and creating a more egalitarian society, recently made two important inaugural addresses—at the FAO sessions in Rome and the other at the annual sessions of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science in Colombo—where he made specific references to the thinking behind these changes and the need for an approach that would stem from the people. Unfortunately these views, which we consider significant, have hardly been made public. These extracts from the inaugural address at the SLAAS sessions, which we publish here, emphasise the value of scientific thinking and action and the need to be stimulated by the economic and technological demands of our own country.

technology is not merely one in which a group of scientists carry out research and publish their research findings for use by development planners or one in which research findings are transmitted to the end users in agriculture and industry. It is largely a question of infusing the nation as a whole, especially the youth, with the creative spirit of science. It is one of developing a nation-wide appreciation of the value of scientific thinking and action and of evoking a mass consciousness of the fundamental role that science has to play in development. To be effective this approach cannot be cold and sterile it has to be carried out in the spirit and excitement that accompanies the development of a country and the challenges of pulling a poor nation to prosperity by its boot strings. Science has to be concerned with ethics and values and the scientific tradition in any country gets enriched to the extent that it is involved in these issues.

If I may be permitted to refer to a matter which has been of some concern to me, I have observed that many of our scientists are still alienated and isolated from the real spirit of the

orientation that is given in the highly sophisticated laboratories of the developed countries has been partly responsible for this position. This situation can only be corrected by ensuring that the training that is given at the University campuses in Sri Lanka inculcates in all scientists a deeper understanding of the problems and the role of the scientist in economic development. In addition the training institutions abroad have to be carefully selected. Our young men and women have to learn to think in socially relevant terms and be stimulated by the technological

demands of the nation for it is only then that scientific research in a poor nation can become truly meaningful.

It would seem to me that we need to know a great deal more about the nature, extent and potential of our own natural resources and to develop technologies that are within our capacity to implement. We need to exploit our own land, water, biological resources to the maximum and to develop simple ways of using our own sources of power, wind, water and solar energy. At the same time our scientists should be fully conversant with all the latest advances in science that are taking place elsewhere in the world so that this information could be utilized in developing technologies and of finding solutions to technical problems that would meet the indigenous needs. Our science should develop on an indigenous base and have a character of its own. In short we need to look in from outwards rather than from out inwards. However a focus on nationalism has certainly to be tempered with a measure of internationalism if the trap of parochial isolationism is to be avoided."