

AGRICULTURAL CONDITIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF RURAL POLICY IN GREECE.

By Prof. A. J. BOYAZOGLU, D.Sc. (Econ.).

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 utilising 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, trifoliums, melons, vegetables and other agricultural products. In 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 obtained.

The succession of vegetation is the following: In the higher parts it generally consists of Fagetum. This is followed by the Picetum (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 360,000 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 (lambs 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 500,000 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 at 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 problems were studied by the most eminent men and radical measures were taken by the State in favour of agriculture from the earliest times. The rural districts have been provided with credits for the promotion of agriculture, and special measures have been taken in favour of marketing agricultural products. It was considered a great honour for a man to be a farmer. Yet these measures were of local importance on account of the peculiar State organization that existed at that period.

A few years before the last war there came into power one of the greatest men Greece has ever had. I speak of Venizelos. From the very first moment that Venizelos became prime minister of the country (1910) he prepared a wide scheme of rural reforms, and in this direction at least he has been followed by most of his successors.

The first steps taken were the creation of a department of agriculture and the organization of provincial agricultural services, as well as research and demonstration stations. These were followed by radical measures concerning the ownership of rural properties. A general redistribution of land took place and the land was given to the people who cultivated it. Then the economic and vocational collaboration of the agriculturists through the co-operative societies and chambers of agriculture was organized. This was then followed by the establishment of the Agricultural Bank, which was a real agricultural bank, responding to most of the necessities of the country notwithstanding the scarcity of means available. Agricultural insurances were instituted (against hail, frost, fire and all other possible contrarities).

The marketing of most agricultural products was organized on a large scale and on a sound basis. A special organization was created to deal with the concentration and disposal of cereals and another (head co-operative and vocational organization) for currants. Special measures have also been taken for the marketing of wines, tobacco, olive oil, etc. All organizations and committees have been under the control of the State, which participated by officials in their administrative boards. There was, however, in each case one responsible person. In most cases agricultural dealing was carried on through co-operative or other organizations. Yet there was no monopoly. A farmer could sell, if he liked, to the merchants.

To remedy the exiguity of land, important works of soil reclamation, regularization of the beds of torrents and rivers, and the execution of irrigation and anti-erosion schemes have been carried out. But one of the most wonderful achievements in Greek rural policy was that of the colonization and settlement of the refugees. This was to make up, in a way, for the failure we have had in our agricultural education, because the whole original scheme was unilateral and to a certain extent wrong. It has also been misapplied in practice. I may remind you that, as a result of the last war against Turkey and the special arrangements of exchange of populations that were made for our nationals living in Bulgaria, who were constantly and systematically persecuted by the Bulgarian Government and the population, we received in an incredibly short time in Greece more than one and a half million men, women and children.

These were settled in Greece in less than three years. This in a country which, at that time, had a population of four and a half million and small possibilities at first sight, since there was already a pronounced exiguity of land and lack of capital.

The refugees have been colonized under practically the best and the most economical conditions. The farmers not only very soon became self-sufficient, but also began to contribute to the general welfare and shortly constituted a determining factor of the country's economy.

The results of the application of the already mentioned rural policy and of the establishment of these refugees have really been wonderful. Eleven years after the completion of their settlement, the agricultural production of Greece was nearly tripled and the individual income of the farmers tremendously increased.

Needless to say, this amelioration of the situation in the rural economy has had a very significant betterment in the conditions of the life of the farming community and a considerable indirect influence on the urban districts. The malnutrition of the population progressively decreased, diseases such as malaria and others greatly diminished, and the whole nation visualized a new era of increasing welfare.

Notwithstanding the existing difficulties and limitations we have already alluded to, this optimistic foresight must be considered as absolutely justified as, with the adequate development of research and rural education, the influx of capital and the execution of the rest of ameliorations already planned, a further redoubling of the agricultural production is in no way impossible.

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 Witwatersrand 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 feat to be proud of. 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. These 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 to-day 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.