

ANNOTATIONS

PLANNING FOR MAURITIUS¹

THE problems of Mauritius are depressingly familiar: a small island with a single crop economy (99 per cent of the exports are sugar), a low average income and an expanding population. The problems are even more severe than in most places, for Mauritius is extremely isolated: it is 500 miles east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean; the population density on this island of 720 square miles is over 900 persons per square mile, making it one of the most densely inhabited areas in the world; the recent increase in population, combined with the stagnant situation of the sugar market, have produced a declining economy, and this decline has been aggravated by cyclones in 1945 and 1960; and both real national income per head and output of sugar per head has been declining in the fifties. Mauritius is an underdeveloped economy with all its problems and has not even made a start toward development.

The British colonial administration has employed expert help to design a governmental program dealing with the whole complex of problems and their interconnections. Two commissions were assigned reports, in which the approach is divided according to two governmental functions: Meade's group deals with economic programs and Titmuss' group with social insurance. As both reports see it, both aspects are dominated by the population problem, which is the main burden of Titmuss' report. Meade recognizes that most economic remedies which

¹ Meade, J. E. *et. al.*: *THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF MAURITIUS*. London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1961. 246 pp.

and
Titmuss R. M. and Abel-Smith B.: *SOCIAL POLICIES AND POPULATION GROWTH IN MAURITIUS*. London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1961. 308 pp.

he proposes could be vitiated by unchecked population increase, but he refers to Titmuss' exhaustive discussion. Let us look at the purely economic problems first.

The first few chapters of the Meade report are a model of clarity of exposition of the economic situation and the underlying factors not only of Mauritius, but of many countries in similar straits. The report looks at several possible remedies. The market for sugar is unlikely to increase; thus, increase in production should be discouraged. A tax on total production is suggested as this would equalize the burden and eliminate the inefficient producer in contrast to a quota system. Other agriculture should be expanded, if possible, but without encouraging uneconomical production through subsidies. The two most likely export products—tea and tobacco—should be developed, and government aid should be given for the production of high quality products at competitive costs with other major producers.

The limitations on expansion of agriculture are so severe that any substantial increase in the economy would have to come from industrialization. While Mauritius has little capital for investment, and little chance of attracting outside capital, it does have an abundant labor supply. Thus, Mauritius should try to build industries which use much labor in relation to its capital investment. Examples would be jewelry, leather goods, artificial fibers and tourism. It would be imperative, however, for the manufacturers to forego even some mechanization which they could afford.

Industries should not become refuges for cheap labor; on the other hand, substantial wage increases would nullify the advantage of a labor supply for Mauritian industry. The authors suggest improvement in real income for labor, without the increase in wage rates which would be reflected in the price of goods. They urge the union to negotiate for fringe benefits, social security, medical care and the subsidization of the cost of living. Two other aspects of the labor situation deserve mention. Although there is widespread unemployment, the sugar industry shows a considerable labor shortage. This is due in part to the attitudes of prospective workers who reject manual, agricultural work and prefer to wait for low-paying

white-collar government positions. Also, this is partly due to a system of contract labor hiring which accentuates the seasonality of the work and discourages young workers from going into it. The latter could be abolished and sugar employment regularized. In addition to this, a campaign would have to be instituted to reduce the prejudice of young workers against manual labor, coupled with a reduction of excess government clerical jobs.

Finally, labor supply depends on an adequate educational system. The main difficulty here is the multi-lingual background of the population—French Creole, English, Hindi, Urdu, and Chinese. Adaptation of the school system to the different backgrounds has resulted in the familiar illiteracy in several languages. The authors suggest required education in English only, fully realizing the difficulty of such an approach in the face of national self-consciousness.

It can be seen that this program is reasonable and well thought-out. Too, it depends on a large degree of self-restraint. This restraint shows itself in the requirement for sugar planters to decrease cultivation, for other agriculturalists to take guidance in production instead of subsidies, for manufacturers to create industries to use a large amount of labor, for unions to desist from increase in wage rates, for workers to accept work in the cane-fields, and for ethnic groups to accept English as the standard language. Although attention is given in each individual case to the difficulties involved, the sum of them becomes staggering and would require attention to the problem of motivation as such, to the conditions under which the population is willing to cooperate in a program which requires immediate sacrifices for long-range gains. This problem of motivation and influence is nowhere clearer than in the reduction of population growth.

Titmuss considers the question of social welfare and population control as an interconnected problem. His projection of the future population shows that, under present conditions, the population would more than double in 25 years, from 600,000 in 1957 to over 1,300,00 in 1982. Even if age-specific fertility were reduced to its 1952 level and mortality stayed constant (i.e. if there were no improvements in medicine and

public health) the population would rise to nearly 1,150,000. Only if the number of births per woman could be reduced to three would the population stay below 1,000,000 in 1982—approximately 980,000.

Besides reduction of fertility, emigration could be suggested as a means of decreasing population. This is an unlikely remedy. Distance from prospective immigration countries makes migration expensive, and hence would require considerable capital for each family migrating. In addition, training for emigration would use the educational facilities needed for producing a local skilled labor force, and would draw off just those people who are needed for the economic development of the country. As the experiences of other countries have shown, even substantial planned emigration makes hardly a dent in the population size; therefore, a definite policy in this direction would have little effect on the basic problem and would make industrialization for the remaining population more difficult. Thus, the Titmuss report is concerned with a social policy which would be equitable and at the same time achieve the three-children family.

The central part of the proposals are on family benefits, encouraging late marriage, low fertility and spacing of children. This includes the following: a marriage benefit for the first marriage of a childless woman over 21; maternity benefits for the first three children (with the youngest child two or over) of women over 21 who had some birth control instruction; standard family benefits for all families with three children or more (independent of the number of children); and abolition of allowances for children in payment of income tax. Other social services are to be modernized and brought into agreement with this policy; for instance, as a part of improved medical services, a family planning service should be established by the government. He also suggests a privately financed large-scale demonstration study on family planning education on the model of those done elsewhere.

This program would pre-suppose a definite government policy in support of a three-children family, and Titmuss explains convincingly and in great detail the need for such a policy. With the expected increase in population, costs of

social services will become prohibitive, especially if they are based on number of children. Richard Meier, in his book *MODERN SCIENCE AND THE HUMAN FERTILITY PROBLEM*, has used Mauritius as a cautionary example of a society with unchecked population growth, and Titmuss uses his description to great advantage. Nevertheless, he realizes the likelihood of opposition; he hopes, however, that it can be overcome. In this respect, the tenor of both reports is the same in that they hope that reason will prevail in problems of an intricate social, cultural, political and motivational context. A part of the summary states this view, which can be applied to all the proposals:

Under certain conditions—and admittedly very stern conditions—the challenge of over-population could, in one generation, be largely overcome. Already certain countries, for example Japan and Puerto Rico—are showing the way. With its relatively small size, ease of communication, educational provisions and other advantages, Mauritius could soon begin to rival them. It could set an example to the poorer countries of the world. It could make its own contribution towards solving the great problem of poverty.

We do not think that a purely negative approach to this question of family limitation would by itself have much appeal. It has to be seen and understood in the whole context of social and economic advance. (p. 241)

Unfortunately, these hopes have so far not been borne out. On account of public reactions, the 1960 legislature postponed *sine die* a discussion on a program for family limitation.

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STATISTICAL GEOGRAPHY¹

THIS generally excellent presentation is advertised as “a handbook without parallel for social scientists concerned with areal analysis.” This is a reasonable claim because it is

¹ Duncan O. D.; Cuzzort, R. P.; Duncan, B.: *STATISTICAL GEOGRAPHY: PROBLEMS IN ANALYZING AREAL DATA*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1961. 191 pp.