27

*ON SMALL HOLDERS' RELIEF BILL : 1

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Sir, I am afraid whether I shall be able to finish all that I have to say on this bill within the ten minutes allotted to me by you. However I will try my best and will be very brief.

This bill proposes to solve the two problems which affect the agriculturists of this presidency. One is the problem of scattered farms and other is the problem of small farms. I do not think that any honourable member who has listened to the speech of my honourable friend the Settlement Commissioner will deny that the scattered farms are an evil and that that evil should be cured as far as possible. I agree with him that there are a great many disadvantages in having scattered farms and so far that part of the bill is concerned I agree that there should be consolidation. Coming to the question of small farms I must say that I differ from the honourable mover of the bill on the question that small farms are unprofitable. Sir, the honourable member Mr. Anderson loaded us almost with figures showing how small the existing farms were and what were the difficulties that were dependent upon the smallness of the farms. I admit there are difficulties in the existence of small farms but I do not admit that small farms are necessarily unprofitable or uneconomic. I do not understand what is the definition of the word "uneconomic" as it is used by the honourable mover of the bill or the honourable member the Settlement Commissioner. Sir, as I understand the term I should like to state that whether the farm is economic or uneconomic does not necessarily depend upon the size of the farm. It depends and in fact it varies with what we call in economics other factors of production. It varies with labour. It varies with capital. If a farmer has got for instance the means to employ increased labour and if he has not got any very large capital to invest then I submit that if this farm is small it would not be proper to call it uneconomic on that account. That being my position, Sir, I would have very much liked to hear from the mover of the bill and also, from the Settlement Commissioner that in our country we have a plethora of capital and that we had large agricultural equipment for a highly efficient sort of production. If they had shown that was the case then we could have agreed with them that the small farms made production

*B.L.C. Debates, Vol. XXI, pp. 607-10, dated 10th October 1927.

uneconomic in so far as they prevented the utilization of the equipment we had to the best advantage. But, Sir, I must confess that the honourable member the Settlement Commissioner has altogether omitted to touch that point. I should have liked to hear from him that the farmer had an enormous amount of capital, that they had ploughs and cattles in large numbers and that they could not employ all that because their farms were too small. So far as I have been able to work out the problem I find that instead of the capital available at the disposal of the farmer being very large and being for instance wasted because his holdings were small, the situation is just the opposite of what we are led to believe. I find, Sir, in the Madras Presidency we have for instance one plough for three acres ; in the Bombay Presidency we have one plough for 6 acres. In the Punjab there is one plough for every two acres. I am reading from the official figures. These are the figures regarding the capital equipment of the farmer and taking the position which I am taking namely that whether a particular farm is economic or uneconomic is dependent not upon the size of the farm but upon whether it is commensurate with the capital which the farmer possesses, I am inclined to think that under the present circumstances it is better to further reduce the farms. That will be my logical position and I am not afraid to face it. I do not therefore understand what is the use of enlarging the farms if, for instance, the farmer has not got the wherewithal to cultivate the land. I do not understand how the increasing of the area of the soil to add anything to any produce if he has not got the necessary labour and capital to cultivate the land.

Then we have also got to remember one fact that ours is an agricultural country and that our soil is exhausted. We have been cultivating it for thousands of years and no matter what efforts we may take we cannot raise the productivity of our soil to the same level as for instance in America where the soil is virgin. We must reckon with that fact. That being so, Sir, the salvation lies not in increasing the size of farms, but in having intensive cultivation that is employing more capital and more labour on the farms such as we have. I therefore think, Sir, that that part of the bill which deals with the enlargement of the farms is altogether uncalled for. But assuming that these two things are necessary namely that we must consolidate our holdings and that we must also enlarge our farms I think it is necessary to look into the methods that are proposed to be employed by this bill more carefully than has been done by the mover of the bill. Now, Sir. the methods which are chiefly employed in this bill are first, control of partition of the immovable property and, secondly, the sale of consolidated holdings. Now, Sir, I do not think that there can be any dispute on the point that if these two methods are adopted, a large part of our agricultural population will be landless, and I do not think that it is in the best interests of the country that the poorer classes should be further pauperised in this manner. Sir, I should like to point out that although the Hindu Law is very defective

in many ways yet the Hindu law of inheritance has been one great saviour of the people. Sir, the social and religious autocracy established by the Hindu Dharma has kept a large mass of the people in perpetual thraldom. If their lot is tolerable under this thraldom it is because the Hindu law of inheritance has prevented the creation of plutocracy. Sir, we do not wish to add economic slavery to social thraldom. Let men be economically free if they are not socially free. I am therefore totally opposed to the abrogation of that just and equitable system of inheritance. At this stage I should like to make one humble suggestion to the honourable mover of this bill. I am prepared to give my support to the first reading of this bill provided he is not wedded to the method of consolidation and enlargement of holding as provided in the Bill. I think, Sir, the better method is to introduce co-operative agriculture for standard areas and to compel owners of small strips included therein to join in cultivation without destroying private ownership. If this is done, if some provision for this is made in the bill, then I would certainly support the bill. (Mr. F. G. H. Anderson indicated dissent). The honourable member Mr. Anderson, the Settlement Commissioner shakes his head. But I can tell the honourable member, that the method which I am suggesting is not my own, but is a system which is prevalent in Italy, in France, and is being followed in parts of England with great advantage. In this connection, Sir, I would earnestly suggest to the Honourable the Leader of the House to give his most careful consideration to what Mr. Otta Rothfeld says in his book; "Impressions of the Co-operative Movement in France and Italy." I would quote a paragraph from it here:

> "As a whole the movement is one with vast potentialities. It has been imitated in France since the war, with good results and in Rumania a similar type of co-operation is almost revolutionizing the husbandry of the country. It is possible that in. co-operative cultivation in common, a solution might be discovered to those problems of Deccan poverty stricken unimproved cultivation which centre round the disputed issues of the "uneconomic holding" and "excessive sub-division of property."

Such a solution at any rate would avoid that revolutionary interference with traditional rights of succession that is so often recommended by light-hearted reformers of non-farming classes and would not bring in its train those consequences in the way of limitation of families which may be anticipated if legislation interferes to disinherit younger children.

So, it will be seen, Sir, that such a system has been actually tried elsewhere and with success. I would conclude by saying that, if the Honourable the Leader of the House is prepared to consider all these suggestions carefully and will not object to any amendments that may be suggested in the select committee on the ground that they are of principle, and is not wedded to the method of consolidation and enlargement of holdings as proposed in the bill, then I have no objection to supporting the first reading of the bill.

●●