

Review of *The Story of FAO*

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This is one book that was read with considerable **prejudice** if by **prejudice** one means “pre-judgment,” the feeling that in one respects “all is right with the world.” The studies have been carefully planned, suitably executed and well written. There are three parts: “The Background,” “FAO: Genesis and Development” and “Technical Cooperation.” Cooperation may have been very technical but the reports are not. The book stands in contrast to a large number of recent works whose literary format is so technical, one would imagine he was reading a factory report or a cooperation account. But the reader is drawn into *The Story of FAO* which is **story**, which is good copy, which is enlightening and which carries one along, though each reader can select his climax. The chief difference is that there is not one happy ending; there are scores of happy endings.

Part III which deals with “Technical Cooperation” may be the most important section. It is divided into chapters which deal respectively with “Near East and Africa,” “Far East,” “Latin America” and “Europe.” Anyone who has any knowledge of the history of the world, or with Toynbee, can easily conclude that the world itself is now moving and progressing. One gets a feeling that the actual brotherhood of man is being attained at a pace that the majority of organizations theoretically dedicated to brotherhood can hardly maintain. There are no exclusive “brotherhoods” here; all stomachs may be alike hungry and also be properly sated.

The great marvel, to the reviewer, is that the problem of world starvation and human undernourishment is being faced. It may have taken centuries to reach the conclusion that it should be faced, but it is being faced. And along with this, almost naturally methods of combating locust plagues and plant pests and diseases are also being taken into account. The importance of these procedures is so vast that little minds cannot comprehend; the fact that they have been faced with success in many instances is well nigh miraculous.

What is wrong with FAO? One cannot apply a coat of whitewash, especially if he keeps in touch with all the organizations in the vicinity which are dealing with starvation and undernourishment. No doubt the eagerness to introduce rather recent technological methods and machines produces both psychological and financial complexities. There have even been some failures from this source. One of the greatest is the inability for the over-trained engineer who has little psychological background to deal with simple peasants. But this situation has not arisen as much as we might suppose. Improvements in simple tools as sickles, scythes, hoes and animal drawn plows have been given tremendous attention—and too little publicity. It does not entertain comfortable people to find that the tools of a century back are now being introduced into all countries. None of them are as picturesque as a McCormick Combine or a John Deere Tractor.

As a specific case one may examine the section (p. 163 ff) “Work With Individual Countries” beginning with India. Quoting (p. 164): “In a sense, then, India is now making itself a vast laboratory for working out ways of hastening changes in agriculture and rural living that have become imperative in many lands. If the undertaking succeeds, that country will be proof that the transition from the old world to the new by peaceful means is possible even under difficult conditions. It seems to be succeeding, and a new dynamic spirit is now evident among millions of Indian villagers.”

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The writer comes out strongly for mechanical equipment and thus differs from some of the staff at the University of California in Berkeley, and some Indians themselves. There is always the danger of “guinea-pigging” humanity even when loudly acclaiming brotherhood and democracy. In Ceylon this policy has led to State Capitalism. Perhaps that is the best way out and the FAO may be pursuing the best possible way. But it is sure to run counter to some big-wigs of the American Legion and a number of vociferous but unenlightened radio commentators.

The new attitudes toward cattle, buffaloes and farm animals in general make the whole nation a sort of zoological experimental station. This has had so many good results: lessening of disease, improvement of stock, increase of milk and egg supplies, etc., that it may even become the guide for much of the rest of the world.

The work of the FAO has also encouraged the fishing industry in many aspects, and is leading toward planned reforestation. Grading system which are used in our canning and drying industries have also been introduced.

Similar reports could be made for other nations. The general result is found in improvements so vast that they are hard to grasp, but also the attendant danger—but only if one is so inclined—of encouraging the growth of central government activities and some sort of invasion of “private rights.” But is the existence of starvation, malnutrition and disease a “private right?” Perhaps we have already entered a new age with new values.

The reviewer’s conclusion is that the FAO, including any and all shortcomings, has been a model for world agencies is general; and this book is a model for reports which any intelligent reader can understand and appreciate.