

Foreign Aid — a Dubious Morality

KEN SIMMANS

MR. HEATH has formally pledged Britain to support the objectives of The Second United Nations Development Decade. Britain, as one of the donor countries, will be expected by 1972 and not later than 1975, to contribute one per cent of her gross national product to helping developing countries.

It is questionable, however, whether aid given so far has achieved the desired results. It has been said that India, since about 1956, has progressed from poverty to pauperism, and now, such external dependence has come to be taken for granted.

If there exist fundamental causes for the lack of development in underdeveloped countries, these same causes may frustrate attempts to help from outside. Man, in all ages, has usually been able to work and supply his own needs when he has had free access to natural resources and is able to barter or trade with other men on equal terms. When man is in his natural condition, free to interact with his economic environment he is usually independent.

Whether this spirit of independence is able to break the surface, depends upon the presence, or not, of restrictions that limit his economic freedom. Even if he has been conditioned by his environment to accept his poverty and inferiority, somewhere in his being he is aware of a great injustice, and his apathy expresses the futility of his situation. Giving the aid to the government of the country to be developed, enables it to direct how the money should be used and encourages it to indulge in grandiose schemes that may actually retard development.

Little can be done by outsiders to remove the internal obstacles that may exist in the economy of countries receiving aid and these may be the most decisive. However, they might at least allow them to trade what goods they do produce without politically motivated obstacles being placed in their path, although the cynic would argue that the whole motive for aid is political.

Supporters of foreign aid, argue that it is the moral duty of rich countries to help poor countries. But the view has been equally argued that foreign aid is a system by which the poor people in rich countries subsidise the rich people in poor

countries, and this is very often the case, especially if the money filters down through governments to destinations for which it was not intended.