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## AGRARIAN REFORM IN ASIA

*By Wolf Ladejinsky*

**I**T is no longer news that land reform is a critical issue throughout Asia, the Near East and Latin America. We are not surprised to see the Shah of Iran going about the country sponsoring a drastic redistribution of private holdings. Only yesterday, the Kingdom of Nepal was a Shangri-La; yet today King Mahendra finds time to listen, question and respond to the proposition that his country, too, must begin to find its place in the second half of this century by dealing with the causes underlying both the poverty of its agriculturists and the low productivity of its agriculture. President Macapagal in the Philippines, President Betancourt in Venezuela and Prime Minister Nehru in India have similarly been using "agrarian reform" in their search for answers to some of their countries' instabilities.

Communism is not the precursor of the agrarian reformism we are talking about here. Communism has made immense political use of the borrowed slogan of "Land and Liberty," and has ridden to power in part on this promissory note. Admittedly, too, it has exerted great pressure on the non-Communist world to look more closely at its land problems—in Eastern Europe after the First World War and in Asia after the Second World War. Yet the wrenching readjustments involved when the landless contend for the landlord's land are as old as recorded history. Tiberius Gracchus (163-133 B.C.), that model of a Roman aristocrat, saw the deliverance of the pauperized farmers of Italy in a program of land ownership for the landless. And many are the examples between then and the solution offered by the French Revolution which show that there has been a continuous chain in the struggle between peasant and landlord. With due allowance for the passage of time and changes in conditions, the problems now as then are fundamentally the same: How relieve the plight of cultivators working mostly for a pittance? How revive stagnating agricultural economies? How root the peasant securely and beneficially on the land he cultivates? The one important departure from the conditions of a bygone age is that the stated problems have the closest bearing on the over-all economic development of Asia, as indeed elsewhere.

## II

The answer to these questions constitutes what is broadly known as "agrarian reform." The term can mean various things to various people within the free world, let alone as between the Communist and non-Communist worlds. As exemplified by Soviet Russia and Communist China, agrarian reform is simple enough: it is a means to political power, based on a promise to the peasant of the one thing he wants most—ownership of the landlord's land—in exchange for his political support. Once the Communists are in power, all the land is confiscated, peasants become farm hands on collectives, communes and state farms, and harsh production and delivery quotas complete the rude awakening from an exhilarating but all-too-brief experience of freeholding.

In non-Communist Asia, agrarian reform is not without political motivation. The emphasis, however, is not on consolidating the power of the state *over* the peasantry but on increasing the state's well-being. The need for drastic changes stems from such questions as who owns or doesn't own the land, how it is used, who gets what out of the land, the productivity of the land, the rate of economic development, and, of course, social status and political power. These are not unique in any one part of Asia; all cut across cultural and national boundaries and together they represent the Achilles' heel of the Asian socio-economic structure.

The mere enumeration of the issues points to the fact that no single panacea can deal with them effectively; even redistribution of the land will not do it unless it is accompanied by the necessary means to work and improve the land. The economic opportunity and psychological incentives which come with the possession of land or security of tenure must go hand in hand with a host of other developmental measures. For this reason, agrarian reform in the sense considered here encompasses all or most of the following elements: distribution of land among the landless and favorable financial arrangements for tenant land-purchases; security of tenure and fair rents; better methods of cultivation through technical assistance, adequate credit, cooperative marketing facilities, etc. Agrarian reform is a combination of a great many things, and not all of them are of equal importance. Important though the other ingredients are, unless those who work the land own it, or are at least secure on the land as tenants, all the rest is likely to be writ in water. And this is the

most difficult step to achieve. It is relatively easy to use science to increase production, but only if the cultivator's relationship to the land and the state's treatment of him and of agriculture create incentives to invest, to improve the land and to raise productivity. Too many of Asia's cultivators are still waiting to find that incentive.

Balzac's memorable description in "The Peasants" of General Montcornet's struggle to preserve his broad acres from the grasping peasants begins: "Whosoever land has, contention has." Montcornet's troubles were over only after he had suffered endless humiliation, had disposed of his land and had flown the nobleman's nest. In recent years, the landlords of Asia have been beset with a good deal of "contention" of their own. Although not universally, many peasants overtly and more covertly are no longer satisfied with their condition and point to the landlord's privileges, whether inherited or paid for.

Recent sojourns in India, the Philippines and Nepal have left the writer with the strong conviction that even in the first-named country, after more than a decade of reform efforts, the cultivator lives and works on the ragged edge of penury. In the rich granary of the district of Tanjore, in the state of Madras, the life of the majority of the cultivators, not to speak of the vast army of agricultural laborers, is indeed "a long-drawn question between a crop and a crop," as Kipling pithily summed it up. And Tanjore is no exception. In the Pampanga Province, one of the most important rice-producing areas of the Philippines, the cultivators, mostly landless tenants, are little better off, if any, than their counterparts in Tanjore. To the question, "What do you sell and what do you buy?" the answer is: "We have little to sell and little to buy." They are hardly on the fringes of the monetary economy, maintain bare subsistence, have nothing with which to invest and innovate, add little to the national product, and cannot be expected to be part of the much-talked-about economic development process. In eastern Terai, in Nepal, an area of relatively sparse population, landownership is for the exceptional few. The economic consequences are such that even a landlord admitted that "the tenants are often getting no more than the rice straw."

Directly related to this problem is the fact that four-fifths of Asia's vast population are peasants; millions of them are on too little land, and hordes of others are crowding onto the same

land. Inadequate tools, archaic methods of cultivation and institutional arrangements over which the peasant has no control underscore his plight and explain his resentment.

Newspaper headlines in Asia are snatched by the glittering economic development plans with their emphasis on industrialization as the cure-all. Yet agriculture, not industry, is the pivot of economic life there. The ambitious postwar schemes for industrialization throughout Asia no longer are mere blueprints, but so far they have made only a small dent in the continent's traditional character. The factory is bringing material advancement to some groups, but surely not to a degree, even in the foreseeable future, to obscure the fact that the heart of the problem of Asia still lies in the countryside. It is on the farm that solutions must be sought and found, if the empty rice bowls are to be filled, if something is to be added to the half-empty ones and if the economic development of the various countries is to proceed by their own efforts.

### III

When looking at rural Asia today, nearly two decades after the start of the reform movement, we see that the old order in the countryside has been under attack—vigorously in some countries, much less so, and with results to match, in many more. The reforms have certain things in common, and not only with regard to the condition of the peasantry. Their purpose is the same whatever the wording of an official pronouncement. President Macapagal of the Philippines spoke for all of them when, in signing the recent Agrarian Land Reform Code, he observed: "Let this signing be recorded in our annals as an Act of Emancipation of the toiling farmer from his slavery to debt, poverty and misery and of his dignification as a human being and as a citizen. By this Act of Emancipation a new revolution is on." After a series of land reform failures in the Philippines over a quarter of a century, whether this is so remains to be seen, but it does mirror the ultimate hope often voiced by all Asian countries when this thorny subject is approached. To bring it about, the Philippine Code relies on two general features common to all attempted reforms in Asia: security of tenure and the creation of peasant proprietorships.

On issues of substance, however, the reforms speak in a variety of voices, which more often than not are a far cry from the exalted

pronouncements made on the supposedly historic occasions. They reflect inevitably the political climate in the country concerned. This determines the will or lack of will to proceed with the task; the kind of specifics with which the general measures are or are not endowed; the care or lack of care with which the enabling legislation is formulated; the preparation or lack of preparation of the pertinent technical and administrative services; the presence or absence of technical agricultural services with their bearing upon success or failure; and, finally and most importantly, the drive or lack of drive behind the enforcement of the provisions of the law. For these reasons, the results of the reform movement in Asia are anything but uniform. They run the full gamut, from Japan and Taiwan where fulfillment in the widest sense has been achieved; to Korea where much land has actually been redistributed but with results far from satisfactory; to South Viet Nam where land reform has been carried out in its essentials, but engulfed by a civil war before it came to fruition. Then there are the Philippines, Nepal, Pakistan and Indonesia—all knowledgeable in writing reform laws, some of them at variance with their fervent preambles—where the record to date ranges between poor performance and non-performance. Finally, there is India, significant and encouraging for what it has attained in unprecedentedly difficult and bewildering conditions, and just as significant and discouraging for what it has failed to attain, and for the reasons why.

The picture, clearly, is mixed, and in order to assess it a number of questions must be raised. The primary one is: Why have some reforms succeeded, others fallen short of their goals, and still others failed to get off the ground?

Just as Soviet Russia was the progenitor of the Communist type of reform, Japan and Taiwan are the progenitors of non-Communist reforms in Asia. Japan, the leader, and Taiwan, the follower and innovator, provided between them all the pertinent elements of leadership, content and implementation which made for a successful reform.

In Taiwan as in Japan, reforms were not designed to satisfy the claims of both contending parties: the tenant was to gain at the expense of the landlord. Without going into details, we may cite a few main provisions to demonstrate the emphasis on the ideological underpinnings and the lack of vacillation about the real intent of the measures. Security of tenure is one of the

cases in point. The sharp reduction of rents in Taiwan was an important move; but more important were the provisions that, for all practical purposes, the tenants could remain on the leased land undisturbed even after the expiration of a contract. This virtually insured the enforcement of rental provisions. Less carefully worded stipulations might have undermined this part of the reform program, as has been the case in India, not to mention others.

Provisions for security of tenure in overcrowded Asian villages, where tenants compete fiercely for the privilege of cultivating somebody else's land, are notoriously difficult to enforce; yet in Taiwan a land redistribution program for the benefit of tenants who cultivated 40 percent of the land became much more feasible as a result of such provisions. With rents effectively reduced, the price of land subject to reform declined sharply. The result was that the traditional approach to land as a prime investment became unattractive. This in turn created a favorable condition for the last phase of the reform—the land-to-the-tiller program—a condition which did not exist in any other countries of Asia concerned with reform.

The idea that the reforms were meant to benefit the tenants is also apparent in the principal provisions about land redistribution and the creation of peasant proprietorships among tenants. Absentee landlords had to sell all of their land at fixed government prices; resident landlords were compelled to sell their land in excess of the permissible ceiling. Neither Japan nor Taiwan aimed to do away with tenancy as an institution; but with determination to enlarge the area of individual, private ownership, the low ceiling made it possible to extract a great deal of surplus land for redistribution. The result is that whereas before the reform 54 percent of Japan's land was owner-operated, after the reform the figure had risen to 92 percent; the respective figures for Taiwan are 60 and 85 percent.

What matters is not only at what level the ceiling is set, but also that it not be evaded. The problem of West Pakistan, to cite but one case, is not merely that the ceiling of 500 irrigated acres and 1,000 unirrigated acres is altogether too high where two-thirds of the owners average five acres each; it is also the exceptions and subdivisions of large holdings among members of a family which were made on the eve of the reform and which have combined to divest the ceiling and, by the same token, the

entire land distribution program of any meaning. It is not surprising, therefore, that even if West Pakistan had implemented this part of the reform, only an estimated 7.5 percent of the country's 2,000,000 tenants might have obtained land. And Pakistan is no exception. In Japan and Taiwan, on the other hand, the acreage that could be retained by a landlord was fixed retroactively, both on the basis of the household as a unit and on the basis of land owned by that household. With a low ceiling, no evasions and effective implementation, the majority of the tenants become peasant-proprietors.

A crucial feature of any reform not intended to result in out-and-out confiscation is price and method of payment. Whatever the differences displayed in Asia in formulating and implementing a program, there is a consensus on one point: the price fixed must be considerably below the market price. Land-purchase under a reform is not an ordinary real-estate transaction where seller, broker and buyer meet in a free market. If it were, and if tenants were able to pay the "going price," there would be no need for a reform. The price fixed by a government is an arbitrary one, the degree of its arbitrariness depending upon how a reformer answers this question: "For whose benefit is the reform designed?"

The question of how to pay for the land is of paramount importance for government, landlord and tenant. No matter what the price, experience in Asia has shown that a government cannot pay in cash, in one lump sum. Here Taiwan provides a lesson worth pondering. In content, Taiwan's reform is in many respects similar to that of Japan, but in method of paying it is not. In Japan, what appeared to be a reasonable price when first fixed was later on swallowed up by a galloping inflation, virtually confiscating the landlord's land. To avoid this possibility, Taiwan tied the price of land to payments in two principal products of the land and to shares of stock in government-owned industrial undertakings. In practice this meant that 70 percent of the value of the land was in the form of commodity bonds, payable in 20 semi-annual installments over a period of ten years, and 30 percent was paid outright in stocks.

This novel method has worked well for all parties involved. The commodity bonds preserved the value of the sales-price against fluctuations in the value of the currency for a ten-year period; the government was freed from the necessity of resorting



to the printing press; and the tenants benefited from easy repayment terms. Moreover, an estimated 40 percent of the total compensation found its way into industrial and business investments, and those who held on to their original stock issues were amply rewarded through a sharp rise in their value in the years following. To date, it is the one known case in Asia of an agrarian reform which has consciously planned—and succeeded—in transferring private capital formerly tied up in land into the general developmental field.

Almost everything that an agrarian law could do to insure the fulfillment of its stated purposes was done. When the laws were implemented, the results surpassed expectations. There was a sharp rise in peasant-proprietorship, a reduction in tenancy and an increase in security of tenure, investment in land improvement, improvement in agricultural techniques, expansion of agricultural productivity, an increase in the standard of living, and a welcome reshuffling of the power structure in the village community. It also created a new and active concern on the part of the politicians about the state of agriculture *and* the welfare of agriculturists.

As indicated earlier, with the exception of important bright spots here and there in India, only very few of these gains can be found in other Asian countries which have gone to the trouble of writing reform laws, but largely limited and vague in content and with just as limited intent to translate them into action. The writing of reform laws—and some nations have done it more than once—may be good practice in preparation for the day when the execution of such laws becomes unavoidable. But as of the moment, it may be said in general that the high hopes reposed in agrarian reform during the immediate postwar years have not materialized in action. Before suggesting why this is so, we will find instructive a brief review of India's vast experience in the course of 15 years of reform activities.

#### IV

It is safe to say that all the disabilities which peasant and land can suffer are to be found in many of the 600,000 villages of India. An observer will find many striking and promising manifestations of a resurgent agriculture; but these are still only tiny islands in the vastness of the debilitating conditions noted elsewhere. The result is that the yields of basic food crops are too

low in relation to the potential of the land and existing food needs, and particularly in view of the grim fact that between 1961 and 1976 the Indian agriculture will have to provide food for nearly 190,000,000 additional people. To remedy the situation, the Indian Government after independence set itself to ease the lot of the peasantry by a drastic overhaul of the land system, the complexity of which almost defies description. This would-be agrarian revolution was to have been attained through the familiar pattern already described, and through the elimination of the "zamindari" system, a peculiarly Indian problem.

The zamindari system was a by-product of the early British rule under which a zamindar or intermediary was given the right to collect land taxes and undertook to pay the British administration a fixed revenue. In return, he was not only permitted to keep a portion of the revenue but was also recognized as the proprietor of the revenue-bearing land. In time the system covered more than 40 percent of the cultivated land of India, and it created, too, some of the worst abuses that can be perpetrated upon a peasantry, including a long chain of non-cultivating sub-lessees all getting a share of the highly inflated rent from the same piece of land and the same cultivator. As one student of the problem put it, "His landlords form a Jacob's ladder in which each rung is occupied not by an angel but a tenure holder, and the top-most by the proprietor." This ladder the Indian Government set out to do away with as almost the first order of agrarian reform.

Despite opposition and administrative problems, the zamindari tenures have been virtually abolished. Tenures have been simplified; the cultivators have been made more secure by paying the land tax directly to the state; and some have acquired full ownership from the state for a moderate purchase price. Not all have benefited equally and not all the 20,000,000 cultivators affected have received permanent, heritable and transferable rights without any strings attached. Nevertheless, the effort was undeniably a first and major step—the clearing of the ground—toward a reconstruction of Indian agriculture. Why this measure succeeded is not difficult to answer. The zamindari system, with its absurdities and injustices, was the weakest enemy to attack, because it was imposed by a foreign power which handed out property rights to which neither the British nor most of the recipients had any claim. Thus abolition of the system became one of the symbols of freedom from the British rule, and it is not sur-

prising that the abolitionists largely succeeded in eliminating it.

Getting rid of this system did not put an end to tenancy in India. Even in the *ex-zamindari* areas the “home-farms” of the former middleman continued to be operated by tenants, and not all the subtenants were eliminated. But above all there was the multitude of tenants—not to mention the millions of agricultural wage laborers—cultivating at least a fourth of the country’s arable land in “ryotwari” areas (as distinguished from the former *zamindari* areas) where owner-proprietorship predominated. The Government of India decided to provide tenants with security of tenure and reduction of rents, and to confer landownership upon the tenants through the familiar ceiling device and officially fixed land prices. Under the guidance and continuous prodding of the Planning Commission, the States have enacted a voluminous body of legislation presumably designed to meet these goals.

Both from the point of view of the content of the legislation and the enforcement of it these reforms are in serious difficulties. Here and there tenants have secured better tenure conditions or have acquired land. In Bombay State, the security of the tenant is strictly enforced and, as a consequence, the rentals are so low that a tenant has little to gain from purchasing land. But as against such cases there are the widespread evictions of tenants that can be traced to the legislation itself, the prevalent failure of the new rental regulations, and the wholesale evasion of the ceiling provisions upon which an increase in peasant-proprietorship was to rest.

Administrative problems are a formidable obstacle to implementation of the reforms. On the other hand, judging by the experience of the largest and most populated state of India, Uttar Pradesh, this is not an insurmountable difficulty—if there is the will to overcome it. More to the point is the faulty content in many legislative enactments. In India, the most glaring manifestation of this is the seemingly reasonable but ill-defined right of the landlord to resume tenanted land for what is euphemistically called “personal cultivation.” As the writer saw in widely separated parts of the country, this has led to mass evictions of tenants; to “voluntary surrenders” of land by tenants in order to salvage some relationship to the land, even if it be as a hired hand; to augmentation of the ranks of agricultural workers; and, inevitably, to the failure of the new rent regulations.

The ceiling provisions did not fare well at all. While the tenancy

reforms can claim achievements in a few states, the same cannot be said about ceilings as a means of acquiring ownership. With becoming candor, the Planning Commission in the Third Five Year Plan notes the following: "On the whole, it would be correct to say that in recent years transfers of land have tended to defeat the aims of the legislation for ceilings and to reduce its impact on the rural economy." For the moment, the question of how much land might have been available for redistribution is academic; of India's 80,000,000 acres or more of tenanted land very little is available for redistribution. In anticipation of ceiling provisions, the landlords divided up the land among members of their families so as to make certain that holdings were *under* the ceiling; for the legislative provisions, unlike those in Japan and Taiwan, did not contain the teeth to preclude such transfers. More recent amendments designed to annul such transfers have had, so far, little effect on the evasions committed.

Needless to say, such developments do not produce the incentives which lead to better living conditions, investments in land, improvement of land and a rise in agricultural productivity. Yet these were the goals of the tenancy reforms—the goals that Mr. Nehru so aptly summed up in the phrase, "placing the peasant in the center of the piece."

## v

From the experience of Japan and Taiwan and from that of India one may learn why so few reforms in Asia have succeeded and so many have not. Neither success nor failure can be attributed primarily to the presence or absence of experts or to a special reform mystique. The usefulness of facts, figures and preparatory work no one can deny; but reforms cannot be "researched" or "studied" into existence. Of far greater importance is the acceptance of the reform idea, to begin with, in such a manner that technical problems are not an excuse for inaction but something to be resolved. There is no country in Asia, however underdeveloped, which does not know how to write a reform law, or what its implications might be. They have written them, and many have not been carried out—precisely because the political decision-makers understood their implications and their inevitable repercussions.

The politicians make or unmake agrarian reforms. It is they who provide the impetus or lack of impetus, who decide between

reform and "reform." They alone can create a condition "when the economic sails are filled with political wind."<sup>1</sup> There is no gainsaying the fact that the economic environment, population pressure on the land, and customary relationships sanctioned by a long history of social and religious traditions exert great influence on what happens to legislation designed to break old institutional molds. But this does not invalidate the main premise—that the content and implementation of agrarian reform are a reflection of a particular political balance of forces in a country. This premise assumes even greater significance in Asia because the peasants themselves, while discontented, have not developed a movement, whether in the form of tenant-unions like those of Japan before the reforms, or peasant political parties like those of East Europe after the First World War. For a time, the Communists in Hyderabad, Tanjore and Kerala exploited the peasant grievances for their own ends; the Communist Huks in Central Luzon played a similar role. For the most part, however, the peasants behaved as if any change in their condition depended upon somebody else. By their apathy they have disproved the reasonable assumption that in an agricultural country a government must have peasant support. The fact is that national and state legislatures in Asia do not represent the interests of the peasantry; if they did, reform might have taken on a different character altogether. The reality is that even where voting is free, the peasantry in Asia is not yet voting its own interests. Except in Japan, the peasants do not yet know that they can be bearers *and* recipients of political gifts; the idea that "we support those who support us" has yet to take root. More important, then, is the role of the articulate and politically powerful pro-reform groups.

## VI

In Japan and in Taiwan both the forces which were indigenous and those which were created as a result of the war favored a drastic agrarian reform and a redistribution of income and social and political power. In the case of Japan, the defeat by the United States and the American influence as an occupying power were crucial in the timing of the reform but were of only limited importance in giving it a radical character. Other factors were also the memories of peasant rebellions; the numerous, if

<sup>1</sup> Doreen Warriner, "Land Reform and Development in the Middle East." London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957, p. 9.

unsuccessful, prewar reform measures; the strong tenant-unions; the windfall of the Communist opposition to the "MacArthur reform"; the emergence of large groups of Japanese who were disillusioned with the old oligarchy; and an eager and active pro-reform leadership in the Ministry of Agriculture which drafted the enabling legislation. This "political wind" found expression in the firm proposition that "those who cultivate the soil of Japan shall enjoy the fruits of their labor." This meant clearly defined provisions, a minimum of half-measures and a minimum of loopholes. Similarly on the enforcement side, the reformers recognized not only that the cultivators had to be made aware of the essence of the main provisions, but that they—and only they—had to be the true implementors of the reform if it were to succeed. This attitude led to the creation of a practical enforcement agency, the local land commissions—so far shunned by all other countries engaged in reform save Taiwan.

The situation in Taiwan on the eve of the reforms was not the same as in Japan, but here, too, special circumstances—primarily non-economic or sociological—created the setting for action. The final decision rested with the politicians or, more specifically, with a political and military leader. The Communist victory on the mainland and the subsequent prevalent belief among the Nationalist politicians that the Communists won because of the promise of land to the tillers played a crucial role in creating the favorable climate. Certain elements in the Nationalist ideology worked to the same end, especially when the beleaguered government realized it needed greater social stability as a means to military security. But none of these factors might have sufficed were it not for the fact that General Chen-Cheng, then Governor of Taiwan and an influential member of the Nationalist Party, had resolved that rural Taiwan was to undergo a thorough change. The tone having been set, the technicians played their important role, fully conscious for whose benefit the reforms were meant. It was the good fortune of Taiwan that the Joint (Chinese-American) Commission on Rural Reconstruction was on the scene to help provide invaluable social, economic and technological advice. The result was a program of lasting agricultural development, as well as of a redistribution of income. The combination of the two prevented the redistribution of income from degenerating into a mere passing phase of peasant welfare.

To return to India: while the need for reform there is surely

as great as in any country in Asia, the difficulties in the way are incomparably greater. Among them are the sheer size of the sub-continent; the administrative decentralization, with each state a law unto itself; the paucity of good land records; the fact that a third of the tenanted land belongs to owners with five acres or less; the fierce competition for any tillable plot of land on almost any terms; the lack of peasant initiative and his inability to comprehend the complex laws; the poor prospects for alternative occupations despite the country's progress of industrialization; and the millions more people added annually to the already overcrowded land.

All these are sufficient to give one pause before rendering any hasty judgment about the tortuous and far from successful path of Indian reforms (other, that is, than the elimination of the zamindari). And yet the handicaps, especially the technical handicaps, do not quite explain why so much of the intent of the reforms is still unrealized. There are States in India which have demonstrated that, given strong leadership, many of the problems can be overcome. What is significant is that most of the handicaps, including the principal one—poor enforcement or non-enforcement—are not always causes but in a large measure consequences of attitudes displayed by state politicians and legislatures. This anti-reform sentiment has proved to be a crucial element in thwarting India's expectations.

By extension, and with variations, the same is true of most Asian countries. In the Asian political milieu, vague and complicated measures generously seeded with loopholes naturally become the rule, and so do evasions resulting from great delays in legislative enactments. It also is natural that little effort is made to explain to the peasants the ABCs of the enactments or to propagate the idea that they are the beneficiaries of the reforms. The assertion is sometimes heard that the tenancy problem need not be taken too seriously; this is not surprising either. It is understandable, too, that enforcement officers mostly behave as if reforms are not meant to be enforced, and with the same impunity as that enjoyed by those whom they are supposed to police. Nor is it surprising that they do not seek the assistance of the peasants in implementing measures that affect them so directly. And yet they are the authentic experts who know who is who in the village, who owns what, and who is entitled to what once the nature of the reform is clear to them.

Clearly, the key to successful reform in Asia is the degree to which the controlling political forces of a country are willing to support reform and their readiness to use *all* instruments of government to attain their goals. Those against whom the reforms are directed will not divest themselves of their property and of political and economic power simply because a government wrote out a decree. Besides, despite the threat of Communism, the great fears generated by the French Revolution or by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 are not immediately in evidence in Asia. The conclusion is inescapable: if the peasantry is to get what is promised, peaceful and democratically managed reforms are not going to fill the bill. Government coercion, whether practiced or clearly threatened, is virtually unavoidable.

It is generally supposed that the Japanese and Taiwanese reforms and the abolition of the zamindari system in India were peaceful affairs. A closer look will reveal that they were peaceful because the landlords in the first two countries knew that overt opposition would have met with drastic punishment. In India, the zamindars knew that public opinion was overwhelmingly against them; and as the British went, they went. The Taiwanese reform took place under the aegis of a military-authoritarian government. It is unlikely that General Chen-Cheng, the activist of the reform, had ever read Theodore Mommsen's comment on how, having killed Tiberius Gracchus for his land-reform efforts, his murderers later on went about enforcing his project. "Loud and often well-founded as were the complaints," Mommsen wrote, "the Senate let the [land] commission have its way; for it was clear that if the land question was to be settled at all, some such unceremonious vigor was necessary."<sup>2</sup> General Chen-Cheng left no doubt in the mind of the opposition that he was ready to proceed with a good deal of "unceremonious vigor."

The story of why few agrarian reforms in Asia have succeeded and why many more are in the doldrums is not a cheerful one, but the end is not yet. For a number of reasons the reform movement will continue to demand attention. Most of the countries in Asia are greatly in need of increasing agricultural production, and they all recognize the role agriculture could and should play as a source of developmental funds. There is a rising awareness of how much the success of this depends on incentives which the existing land-tenure system does not provide. This is now

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Mommsen, "The History of Rome." New York: Meridian Books, 1958, p. 54.



particularly recognized in India. But there are other considerations which augur well for the eventual liberation of the Asian peasantry.

Regardless of the meagre results so far, any preoccupation with agrarian reform represents an advance. It serves notice that the issue will not just go away. The mere writing and passing of reform laws is a good thing, even if they are deficient and their execution is obstructed. Their very existence is a promise to the tenants and a threat to the landlord, even though it often is not immediately perceptible. For even though the cards are still stacked in their favor, many landlords are in a troubled state of mind, not about the plight of their tenants but about their own future. They know that this is not the last round in their tug of war with the tenants. Some of the provisions most damaging to them are still on the statute books, and some day someone may venture to apply them. They recognize that the old order in the countryside is not what it used to be and wonder whether their best days may not be over. This uneasiness is not widespread but on the other hand it is not rare.

These are significant straws in the wind, but if they are to be capitalized upon, if agrarian reform is to be attained sooner rather than later, pressure will have to be applied by a dominating political group willing to face the issue squarely, willing to bring into play all the institutional resources of a country, and willing, if need be, to act with "unceremonious vigor." This is the only road of progress until the day when the peasantry becomes a source of authority and a mainspring of change. But in whatever way it comes, in most instances the realization of agrarian reform is a precondition of the economic, social, political and technological changes without which democracy in Asia has no bright future.