

Colin Tudge, **The Famine Business**, Faber and Faber, 1977, £3.95.

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The 'World Food Problem' has become a cliché in the brief period since the monolithic World Food Conference met in Rome in 1974 with the aim of tackling the problem on a global basis. Yet the situation grows ever bleaker, and promises of world food security and 'food-aid' targets have never been translated into action. Colin Tudge's idiosyncratic book makes a brave but not always successful attempt to sort out the truths from the half-truths, the facts from the calculated guesswork and the myth from the reality.

Though the existence of a 'world food problem' cannot be denied, for Colin Tudge the answers are attainable if not always acceptable. Basically, they require a reorientation of agricultural thinking towards policies aimed at feeding people, which may seem obvious but which is, according to Tudge, rarely accepted. Such agricultural thinking does not mean a heavier concentration on the agriculture of the Western capitalist nations with its wasteful utilisation of precious fuel, its emphasis on flavour-killing and nutrition-robbing processing with a concomitant increase in mechanisation to the detriment of 'subtle husbandry techniques'. Furthermore, belief in

this sophisticated and highly-mechanised agriculture implies the West's right to trade this sophistication for raw materials from the Third World. This belief is behind the notion of the 'World Farm' so eloquently set out by Henry Kissinger—'We are all one economic system'. But for Colin Tudge the World Farm idea is as useless as the current mania for self-sufficiency among the effete middle class:

. . . if we seriously believe that a well-fed population in a stable world is a worthwhile goal, then we must accept that western development has been a unique and unrepeatable phenomenon; that we are not the world's leaders . . . because we cannot be followed. (p. 117)

Tudge's answers are embodied in the notion of 'Rational Agriculture' which attempts to make the best use of the land while meeting 'the nation's nutritional needs and gastronomic aspirations'. The key to this 'rational agriculture' is self-reliance, demanding an approach similar to that in China where the blend of agriculture and industry is geared to the people's needs and makes use of their abilities. The primary aim should be to develop grains, pulses and potatoes to provide the people with the essential vitamins, minerals, proteins and fats which they require. Meat should be of secondary importance so that the vast amount of grain utilised in animal feeding can be redirected to human consumption. The protein and other food-value content of grains, pulses and potatoes has been grossly underestimated in the rush to satisfy our carnivorous cravings.

'Rational agriculture' would aim at national self-reliance but with a proper regard to other nations' needs and strengths. Monoculture would disappear, the concentration instead being on regional differentiation, dependent upon climate and conditions. The micro-climates of hill-sides, sheltered leas and river-banks would be developed for specialist crops. 'Rational agriculture' would aim to break down the barriers between town and country, involving everyone in agriculture under professional guidance. Indeed, a large labour force would be required as lost husbandry techniques are rediscovered. 'Rational agriculture' would also help to overcome that irony of capitalism whereby freedom is prized but farmers are forced to grow what the market requires. Tudge also makes a plea that 'rational agriculture' should not be dismissed because it is not profitable, for profit is not the aim. The aim is to feed people efficiently and an economic framework should be sought which encompasses this maxim.

The Famine Business, while undoubtedly a significant contribution to the discussion on the world food problem, has a slightly unreal quality. It is a hybrid, with economics and nutrition sometimes unhappily married. There is great sense in 'rational agriculture' but how great an upheaval is required before the desired results are achieved? 'Rational agriculture' requires rational policies in a world where irrational and politico-historic principles for action are prevalent. What the book really emphasizes is that in order to make a genuinely determined attack on the world food problem, people must be educated away from nutritional myths and economic biases. Such a process, of course, takes time and Tudge denies promoting revolutionary change. But is there any other way in which 'rational agriculture' can be speedily established? Indeed, the implication behind 'rational agriculture' is that of a considerable alteration in political and economic systems throughout the world. These considerations are avoided in an appeal to the discovery of a 'suitable economic framework', but all the examples come from China.

Similarly, the appeal to 'rational agriculture' as an antidote to world food problems loses strength in the plethora of references, both implicit and explicit, to British agriculture. References at the outset to the World Food Conference are not taken up and no attempt is made to discuss the concept of 'rational agriculture' as it might be applied to Third World economies. If it is Tudge's intention to display Western agriculture as that most in need of rational change, he succeeds. The intention may well be to argue that change in the West will lead to 'rational agriculture' elsewhere because the West controls international agricultural policies. But if this is the argument, then it is not made sufficiently clear.

The Famine Business is relevant to any discussion of future agricultural policies. Jauntily but incisively written, it is easy to read and contentious. Beneath the value judgements, appeals for a return to wholemeal bread and potatoes, and the often-scantly substantiated facts lies a reasoned argument deserving serious attention. The book is primarily concerned with abuse; abuse of agriculture by capitalist economic theory which attempts to cast it in an industrial mould and thereby destroys much of agriculture's purpose—that of feeding people abuse, by Western agricultural policies, of the Third World which is forced into acceptance of an often irrelevant agricultural sophistication; abuse, indeed, by concentration on certain dietary principle of our own health, when simpler and

more nutritious alternatives are available. 'Rational agriculture', self-reliance and sensible nutritional principles, it is argued, are available. The proof of the pudding, though, is in the eating and the pudding may remain indigestible for some time to come.