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NO ROOM FOR GLOOM

POVERTY IN INDIA AND ITS SOLUTION by Charan Singh. Asia Publishing House, Bombay, Pp. 527, Price Rs. 27.

A book on poverty, price rupees 27. Anyway, about five years ago Mr. Charan Singh (U.P.'s Minister for Agriculture) had 'x-rayed' joint farming through a book. The present volume is that old stuff with a rehashed tail (last four chapters recast), some sprinkling in between, and a new urgent sounding title. But this redressing seems to have added to the book's value.

The author was among the first who stood up against joint co-operative farming as envisaged by our planners and economists. Seventy per cent of India subsists on soil. He was convinced that agrarian reforms are essential, but in our own way. The Marxian way is not for us. Through a major part of his work he has built up a case against joint farming (with merged holdings) that cannot be ignored. Isn't joint farming just a twentieth century version of landlordism, with the elected few taking the place of the landlord? "Local bosses, which the officials of the Co-operative will degenerate into, will slowly but surely undermine the very foundations of our nascent democracy and reduce the peasantry, 'their country's pride,' to the status of mere labourers." His is a thesis on causes of poverty and its possible solution. In the process he has highlighted the lopsidedness of our development. Industrially we are marching ahead, without waiting to take agriculture along. This amounts to leaving three-fourths of India in grinding poverty—the very thing we profess to be driving out.

Only the other day the Union Minister for Co-operation, Mr. S. K. Dey, lamented that joint co-operative farming had had a "relatively retarded progress." He even suggested "an intermediate stage" in co-operative farming where industrial farmers would "pool everything except their land," keeping silent about what that 'everything' would be. Thus, by and by, Mr. Singh's conclusions are being borne out. May be, the time is not yet ripe for gloom, but it should set a thinking the champions of reigning schemes for removal of poverty especially when they have seen their 'baby's' poor growth. Keeping in view conditions peculiar to our country, we should produce some indigenous form of co-operation suited to our own genius. And this should be done before the point of no return where disaster awaits. —
O.P.S.

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