

Weekly Notes

Door open, door shut!

THAT "the R.S.S. approach did not fit in with the Congress mentality," is a classic in understatement, for which the credit goes to Pandit Nehru. It must be added that to him also goes the credit for making very, very clear something which should never have been left obscure, *viz.*, that the Congress could have nothing to do with the R.S.S. The law is an ass, this every one knows. But the occasions are not many when one realises that the constitutions of political bodies may leave as much room for casuistry as do the legal codes. Going by the letter of the constitution, there is nothing to prevent anyone, who is not a member of any other political organisation, to join the Congress. The elucidation of this part of the rules held the door open for the R.S.S. to enter the Congress.

But another provision in the same constitution debars members of the Congress from joining any volunteer organisation other than those organised by the Congress itself. This rules out admission to the Congress for members of the R.S.S., if

- (a) the latter is recognised as a volunteer organisation,
- (b) members of the R.S.S., seeking admission to the Congress, do not resign from the former.

Curiously enough, this other provision in the Congress constitution, which is neither very obscure nor unknown to the members of the Working Committee was not cited when elucidation was sought on this disputed point which¹ should never have been in dispute.

Punjab Canal Dispute

WHAT HAS come to be known as the Punjab Canal Dispute has undergone many vicissitudes of fortune. Pakistan now wants it to be taken up by the Boundary Commission. At one time, she thought of the World Court. In the eloquent words of

Mr. Zafarulla Khan the dispute threatened "to put in serious jeopardy the maintenance of international security and peace." Pakistan's Foreign Minister has succeeded so well at Lake Success, and has become so much United Nations minded that for him the attempt to bring the tributaries of the Indus under an International Control Commission like the one for the Danube was worth trying. At least, that was what he thought.

When it was decided to set up the joint tribunal to settle all pending boundary disputes, the question of Punjab Canals was not raised at all. Pakistan now takes the stand that they had staked a claim for the inclusion of all the protective bunds, etc., which she maintains to be an essential part of the Sulemanki head works, as early as July, 1948. Therefore, no dispute could be said to exist at the time of Inter-Dominion Conference which decided to set up the Boundary Commission, "since the Government of India might have agreed to Pakistan's proposals." But since no final reply had been received by September, 1949, Pakistan now thinks that the dispute can be and should be on the tribunal's agenda as it turns on the interpretation of the Radcliffe Award.

The Award, it may be recalled, allotted the head works to West Punjab, the actual weir is at Suleimanki. But all the protective bunds, etc., fall within Indian Union territory. Pakistan complains that she has been given the pound of flesh all right but is not allowed to spill a drop of blood in the process of collecting that flesh. But if awards are to be revised to mutual advantage, this can only be done by mutual agreement, not by taking one's stand on the letters of the Award.

The beginning of this dispute can be traced to the standstill agreement which was signed by the Chief Engineers of the two Punjab in December 1947 for the continuance of supply of water to Pakistan canals against payment?

from head works in India. As Pakistan was in no hurry to renew the agreement and allowed it to lapse, the Government of India stopped the supply of water to West Punjab from April 1, 1948. Soon after, the Chief Engineers of the two Governments met again and came to an agreement whereby West Punjab, recognised that East Punjab had become the owner of the Upper Bari Doab Canal system and of the Ferozepur head works according to the Radcliffe award and the instrument of partition. This agreement provided for the supply of water for a limited period by India but was turned down by Pakistan. The matter was taken up once again at the Inter-Dominion Conference in May 1948. Pakistan showed a very friendly attitude at that Conference and agreed to a gradual reduction of water supply to West Punjab, in view of the circumstances prevailing in East Punjab. India responded by continuing the water supply on the understanding that Pakistan would ultimately tap alternative sources. But her suggestion for an overall water survey at the August Conference found no favour.

Apart from the clear wording of the Radcliffe Award, appeal to equity does not alter the case. The irrigation schemes in the Punjab were largely confined to the Western part and hence partition has left East Punjab bereft of the fertile and irrigated areas. Of the 16 canal systems, only 3 went to the share of East Punjab and of the 40 million acres of irrigated land in the undivided province in 1945-46, East Punjab got no more than 3 million acres.

Agricultural Statistics

FOR THE World Census of Agriculture to be held in 1950-51 under the aegis of the FAO, the Government of India set up a Committee to go into the question of our agricultural statistics. With Mr. W. R. Natu as the Chairman, and Dr. Pense

and Dr. Sukbatme among the members, the Committee looked quite an impressive body. And naturally, expectations were raised that it might tell us something about our agricultural statistics which would correct many of our current misconceptions. This the Committee has not done.

From the summary released to the press, it is not clear whether such questions were beyond its terms of reference, or whether the Committee imposed a self-denying ordinance upon itself. But all those who have been looking for some light on agriculture and have not found it, will regret this decision, whoever might have been responsible for it.

The Committee points out that out of the total geographical area of 781 million acres of land in India, the present agricultural statistics cover only about 557 million acres, as no estimates are available for the remaining 29 per cent of the area. The data, it warns, are not of the same uniform standard of accuracy and reliability in the different provinces and states, as their methods of collection are not the same and vary with the system of land revenue in force in the different arenas.

This, we humbly submit, is a piece of under statement. The acreage figures outside permanently settled tracts were hitherto believed to have had a high degree of accuracy, thanks to the village Patwari. In the permanently settled areas, of course, there are no Patwaris and, therefore, no reliable statistics of the areas under different crops. But now, we are told, the village Patwaris are overworked, which must impair their efficiency. Worse still, the compulsory procurement of foodgrains provides a definite incentive for them to cook up the figures; in any case, it introduces a bias in their estimates.

Now, consider, what was it that we were getting before this happened. In one part of the country, the acreage figures were fairly reliable but not in the other. In neither were the yield

figures much good, being based upon subjective estimates, which could not be, or were not counter-checked, either by crop cutting experiments or by random sampling or other advanced statistical techniques. If one were to be guided by one's elementary ideas of probability, the conclusion would be frightening. What was the margin of error in the subjective estimates of crop yields? It was apparently nobody's business to estimate it!

Assuming, on a rough guess, that this margin ranged between 15 per cent and 20 per cent, would the comparison of the statistics of agricultural production between one year and another warrant any valid statistical conclusions unless the variations were wider than this margin of error? Could we even say that agricultural production had increased or decreased from one year to another?

The suggestions for improving the agricultural statistics made by the Committee require closer examination. This has necessarily to be postponed till such time as the Information Bureau of the Government of India choose to supply the full text of the report, if they do so at all.

The lid off Drink

MR. J. R. D. TATA made a strong enough case at the Advisory Council meeting at New Delhi for the provinces to fall in line with the Centre; otherwise, there would be no point in framing any policies, since they could not be carried out. An obvious divergence in the outlook between the Centre and the Provinces is illustrated by the programme for prohibition which has not narrowed down, either by the lapse of time or by the spate of criticism levelled at it. It has neither lost its force nor its power for evil. While the Central Government have been cutting down highly desirable public expenditure in order to contain inflation, Bombay has not swerved from its decision to go completely dry from April 1, 1950. And yet for three successive years, the provincial budget has been showing an ever widening gap. While in 1947-48 Bombay had a small surplus of Rs. 2,40

laks the revised estimates for the next financial year showed the deficit of Rs. 97 lakhs which in the budget estimate for the current year, widened to Rs. 3,98 lakhs, including a deficit of Rs 38 lakhs on account of the merged states. Both this year and in the year before, Government had to impose new taxes and to raise the rates on old ones.

Meanwhile, excise revenue from liquor progressively declined as follows:

	Rs. lakhs
1947-48 (Accounts)	8,04
1948-49 (Revised)	6,10
1949-50 (Estimate)	4,77

The figures, however, hardly give any idea of the net cost of prohibition, because they leave out the additional expenditure that will be needed to enforce prohibition, and to create those conditions which alone can stamp out the drink evil. The superintendence charges for enforcing prohibition alone, according to the provincial budget, increased from Rs. 2,77 lakhs in 1947-48 to Rs. 15 lakhs in the revised estimates for 1948-49 and are expected to reach Rs. 16.46 lakhs in 1949-50. But this is not all. If drinks are taboo, facilities will have to be provided for recreation and refreshment which will involve a substantial expenditure.

In the budget for the current financial year, provision has been made for Rs. 14 lakhs for such welfare expenditure; the extension of the Nira scheme will also cost some more. But these figures, to repeat, do not tell the whole story. If you want to make men virtuous, you must make them joyous and even such joy as can be thought of by our P.W.D, and the Secretariat would cost many crores, and not lakhs, for a province like Bombay with its large industrial population.

When the revenue from excise on liquor which is still in the neighbourhood Rs. 5 crores, is completely wiped out next year, the provincial budget would look pretty grim. And the one elastic source of revenue hitherto pressed into service, viz., the sales tax, may not prove as productive in future in view of the story attitude taken by the Centre, against

raising the cost of raw materials and prices of exports by its levy. So, if the simple dictum that the provincial budgets must balance is followed to the letter, there can be no doubt whatsoever that prohibition will have to go.

The folly of prohibition is also being brought home from other quarters. So many provinces had to curtail expenditure on education and social services to offset the IOSS in excise revenue. There was a time when public opinion could be worked up against the Government—that this was a foreign government—that our rulers forced us to visit grog shops so that our children could go to school. That relationship, unfortunately, still holds good! And if the choice is presented fairly to the people whether they would rather have some people drink or let all the people sink in the bog of high prices and inflation, it would not be difficult to forecast

the choice. But, then, the issues are never presented that clearly.

This is not to suggest that the only valid argument against prohibition is that of government finance. America tried it and realised the folly of trying to make men in the mass conform to preconceived notions of what was good. It was prohibition which brought in boot-leg liquor, it turned erstwhile teetotallers into habitués of speak-easies which sprang up overnight, like mushrooms, in every lane and bye-lane. What Americans could not get was a good drink. But adulterated liquor was in plentiful supply, notwithstanding the resources of the federal police and the power of the law. Scandinavian countries have more successfully fought the evil of drink by legalising moderation. To work along those lines calls for patient organisation and sustained endeavour. There are no short cuts to success in this or in any other field of social welfare.

Meanwhile, the conference caught a glimpse of the colossal loss in production that the country is undergoing due to closure of certain industrial undertakings and, for the moment at least, chose to ignore it. In a memorandum prepared by the Ministry of Industry and Supply for the perusal of members, it was stated that more than 217 factories had already shut down, throwing about 80,000 workers on the streets. In addition, about 30 textile mills had given notice of closure. Thus about 3 per cent of all the industrial workers in the country, except those employed in the railways, plantations and mines, had been rendered jobless.

Reasons for the closures, it was stated, were break down in machinery, lack of finance, scarcity of raw materials, accumulation of stocks and labour troubles—most of which can be immediately removed by effective planning and energetic action.

But the Conference refused to do anything more than pass a resolution to set up Working Parties and another to fix production targets for 1950. The labour leaders who became a party to these resolutions did not even enter a word of protest on behalf of the (newly) unemployed thousands! On the other hand, the chiefs of INTUC issued a statement appealing to labour "to play the game" and castigating it for "slow-down" tactics.

Does all this mean that labour is on the run? Opinions differ. But it is fairly clear that the labour leaders, by agreeing to participate in the Working Parties which are to report in six months, are really playing for time. The constitution of these bodies means that retrenchment, instead of coming up immediately, would be delayed till they submit their report. But weighted as they are by Government nominees, the Working Parties are likely to be more unfavourably inclined towards the workers than otherwise. It may be that when retrenchments actually come, labour will not surrender without a fight. At the moment, however, its leaders appear to be diffident.

Our Delhi Letter

Labour On The Run?

THE LAST lurking hopes of simple left-wingers who had put faith in the socialistic bearing of the Nehru Government were dashed to the ground last week by Dr. John Matthai's "brilliant" performance at the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Central Advisory Council of Industries. It was a long step from the grandiose declarations in favour of nationalisation which had become the fashion with Government spokesmen shortly after independence. Since then, the official policy had undergone a distinct, though gradual, shift from socialisation to "mixed economy". And though the Prime Minister reiterated last night that the latter was the "only intelligent solution of the Indian problem", it is painfully evident that the balance has been struck at a point most favourable to capitalists. The Finance Minister's "tonic" to the industrialists, for one thing included such sanguinary potions as a promise of less direct taxation, free economy con-

cessions to "evaded" money and de-rationing. Sure enough, the stock exchanges lost no time in rallying.

But perhaps more than Dr. Matthai's lucid summation of what had been stated already, though at different times, by the Deputy Prime Minister and other official spokesmen, the important thing to consider is how the labour leaders took it. Here it must be recognised that the issue could not lend itself to a straight fight between divergent class interests. It was confused by the emphasis which both agreed to lay on greater production.

Differences were, however, evident on the manner of achieving increased output. The industrialists wanted incentives; labour demanded much the same thing—for itself. They were both agreed on rationalisation but while labour wanted retrenchments to be effected in the context of an expanding economy, the industrialists appeared to have the opposite ideas.