

Weekly Notes

Drop it !

IF the sense of the House governs its action and not the voting commandeered by party whip. Government should give up its determination to go ahead with the amendment of the Penal Code, for rarely has Parliament criticised any measure so bitterly. The most objectionable feature of the Bill which has been retained by the Select Committee is, of course, the provision for making defamation of public servants a cognisable offence. BY including this in the Bill, which was supposed to simplify the Penal Code and ensure speedier justice, the Home Minister is trying to extort too high a price for what is legitimately due to the people of a free country—speedier justice. By persisting in it, he has already succeeded in raising a hornets' nest. The blessings of the Press Commission will not shield him from the consequences.

Stanvac Refinery Opened

THE formal inauguration of the Stanvac Refinery by Shi K C Reddy, Minister for Production, was an elaborate affair. But it has been robbed of much of its news value by the progress made, consistently ahead of schedule. The unveiling of a plaque by the Governor of Hornbay commemorating the start of construction work had been in itself a ceremonial affair; so was the arrival of the first consignment of crude oil and the subsequent extraction of refined oil from the plant.

Situated in one of the most beautiful surroundings to be claimed by any refinery in the world, the red glow from its premises has been a familiar beacon and a feature both of the sea and landscape for many months now. That is how the refinery has made itself known, 'The present ceremonies bring to a close a programme of construction that has few parallels in point of elaborate, detailed planning and speedy execution.

Soviet Team for Steel Plant

THE team of experts selected by the Government of India to assist the Soviet Technical Mission, which is coming to discuss the esta-

blishment of a steel plant, are all officials, except for Shri P D Kutar, Technical Director of Tata Iron and Steel Company. Among the officials are Dr Lahiri, Director of the Fuel Research Institute, Shri B R Malhotra, the Chief Engineer of Hindustan Steel Ltd Shri V B Sondhi, of the Geological Survey. Shri Mittal and Shri II vat, of the Central Water and Power Commission, and Shri Mathulla, Sindri Fertilizer Factory. This is no handsome response to Shri j R D Tata's complaint about industry not being consulted at the time of the setting up of the Hindustan steel plant.

There is need for important consultations about a technical feature of this scheme which continues to puzzle the non-technical observer. True, steel can also be manufactured economically even in very small plants. But when the country has adequate raw materials as well as other resources for developing steel production in a big way, why should it go in for a half-million ton unit, since in Soviet Russia as well as in other major steel-producing countries, the usual practice is to have units of a million and half tons or more? The expansion undertaken by tire Tatas with prior approval of Government suggests the same trend. Why then a half-million ton plant and the inevitable subsequent expansion which is bound to be costly and technically no better than improvisation, a result of after-thought?

Trouble in the Air

THE airlines were taken over because they were not doing well and it was expected that centralisation, unified operation and control by the Government Corporation would result in improvement in efficiency as well as better financial working. It is too early yet to pronounce a final judgment. But neither has the operational efficiency of the internal airlines been conspicuous nor have the financial results been such as to justify the hopes entertained. On the contrary, the length to which the Ministry of Communications has gone in explaining away the heavy losses suggests that far from any indication of an eventual improvement, departmental management is going to set up a new record in bungling. At

the moment, the operations of Indian Airlines are too much mixed even for a mixed economy for the airlines which the Corporation took over were a pretty kettle of fish and putting an ICS at the top has not produced the miracle. Neither does the Corporation look like breaking away from the apron strings of departmental management which it will never do until its chairman ceases to be a member of the Services. Its affairs naturally contrast strikingly with those of its sister corporation which retained its compact organisation more or less intact. To look at this picture and that and draw conclusions, would therefore, be unfair. The losses of the Indian Airlines Corporation for the year ending July 31, far exceeded the losses of the concerns it took over put together in the last completed year for which accounts are available. On the other hand, Air-India International, which retains the name of the company from which it took over, made a substantial profit as against a small loss. Why lies difference?

The press note released on the subject seems almost to resent that the Air-India International should have been able to show such line performance, and attributes it, among other reasons, to the introduction of tourist traffic and to the grounding of Comet planes. It also mentions, unsuspectingly, it seems, another reason for improved financial results, viz, "the operation of the existing fleet at an increased rate of utilisation and general increase in the volume of traffic". One wonders why the Indian Airlines could not also do the same. After all, the Corporation would not suggest that India has reached the saturation point in air travel or that its existing fleet is being utilised to the maximum. There must be scope for improvement in both directions but the management has not shown any signs of being aware of either, far from attempting anything on these lines.

It looks a safe bet that Indian Airlines is going to matter and matter in a large way, in influencing the future of public corporations and if the Communications Ministry does not watch its steps, it is going to set up a very bad precedent indeed.