

we have come to take integrated India so much for granted that it requires a mental effort today even to imagine that it could be different and yet the possibility of disruption in those early days of freedom did not lie in the realms of imagination alone. It was very much a reality, looming large over the horizon.

It may be that it was not all Sardar Patel's doing. The source from which the native states drew their strength had sapped and their withering away was only a matter of time. But even so, what would have come in course of time was put through in a matter of weeks and months—what would have been a process of history was made into a scheduled performance by the States Ministry with a despatch, planned order and deliberateness that has no parallel in the history of this country and hardly many in the history of other countries. The Sardar's share in this masterpiece of national welding was unique. The States Ministry was the instrument and the Sardar wielded it with inflexibility of purpose, clarity of vision, uncanny skill and a juggernaut-like display of determination. With a judicious blend of cajolery and bullying, he got their signatures on the dotted line from the princes to the document that consigned the princely order into the dust-bin of history. People in power do not part with their power so readily but that was the miracle that the Sardar achieved.

In the fitness of things, the States Ministry should have been winded up when it had accomplished this historic task. It left a trail of glory behind it. But so well did it perform its job, that it rendered itself superfluous; It left no mantle to fall on its successor and what the Home Ministry takes over today are some loose ends that the States Ministry collected later, such as the reorganisation of States which is quite a different affair from the integration of India.

### **Lignite, Coal and Dyes**

**A**T long last some hard facts about the lignite deposits in South Arcot, Madras, have been reported by the British firm of consulting engineers whose services had been secured under the Colombo Plan. Armed with the report, the Government of India has set up a South Arcot Lignite Authority. Lignite has suffered as much from

thoughtless publicity as from uninformed popular enthusiasm fed on it and the outcome has naturally been disappointment, impatience and frustration. Here was the promise of a ready solution to the problems of industrial development in the South and yet nothing was done for years to redeem that promise. The least that can be expected now is that the Government should make amends for its past remissness by publishing the report submitted by the consultants.

The hard facts are that lignite-deposits lie at a depth of 160 to 250 ft; the thickness of the seams vary but the average is reasonably high being about 50 ft. As the seam runs the length of a mile and a half, the potentialities are far from negligible. The water table is also fairly high and mining of lignite would not be possible until arrangements are made for drying the mines upto a sufficient depth, at least 50 ft below the base of the lignite seam. Drainage will therefore be a major problem.

The most immediate use to which these large deposits of lignite could be put is for running a thermal power station of considerable capacity, besides converting lignite into bricks for use as fuel. The other uses of lignite are also many, but these are in the range of by-products, the same as in the case of coal. And if we are serious about the building up a chemical industry based on coal—after all, lignite is only coal in the making—there was no point in waiting for lignite. Surely it was not the inadequacy of raw materials which had been holding us up. No one has complained about the inadequacy of low grade coals in this country nor has much concern yet been expressed in a practical manner for stopping the wastage of gas and by-products that can be easily derived from coal.

On the contrary, even the humblest beginning on these lines has run up against obstructions and unexpected snags. One such was the report, utterly senseless and quite incredible, that the Government had already come to a decision regarding the proposal for a Coke Oven Plant, the feasibility of which is now being examined by a Committee under the chairmanship of Shri D C Driver. The Committee's terms of reference are:

- (1) To make an assessment of the demand for coke and to

examine the expansion programme of existing producers of coke in the country;

- (2) If the need for additional coke is established, to report on the quantum and the size of plant that will be necessary as well as its appropriate location;
- (3) To examine the prospects of by-product recovery and coal-tar distillation plants, against the demand, current and expected, for the primary organic chemicals obtained as by-products directly from coke-oven gas or from distillation of coal-tar;
- (4) To examine the scope for and economics of a thermal power plant as an adjunct to a coke-oven plant, if established at Durgapur; and
- (5) To examine other possibilities of utilising coke-oven gas in the vicinity of a coke-oven plant for improving the economics of operation of the plant.

It should be noted that utilisation of by-products has not been made the principal object of the enquiry; it is only secondary. Even so, it is for the first time that this crucial first step to a whole range of development is being touched. Meanwhile the development of chemical industries has not been kept in abeyance altogether. It is being taken up in a piecemeal and uncoordinated manner, at points that are, so to say, widely dispersed from the base and no attempt is being made to develop that base. It makes little sense to serious students of economic development that the nucleus of a dye-stuff industry from imported intermediates should be started on the West Coast while the colliery belt should cry for the development of a whole range of by-products and the cry should attract scarcely any notice.

### **Backlog of Cottage Industries**

**T**HE possibility of the role of cottage industries undergoing a sea-change between the first and second Five-Year Plans, has been hinted at elsewhere in this issue. There is, however, a considerable backlog to be cleared and as the first Plan period draws to its close, the Government appears to have been suddenly alerted and is putting through a number of measures all at once. For the present,