

**Non-Justiciable Directive**

THE Prohibition Inquiry Committee, appointed by the Planning Commission, has recommended nation-wide prohibition by April 1, 1958. Judging by the press summaries of the Report, It would appear as though the approach of the Commission has largely been moralistic, and proper consideration has not been given to the financial, administrative and even social aspects of the problem. Shri P Kodanda Rao, in his ably argued minute of dissent, has rightly questioned this rather priggish approach of the Commission to a problem which cannot be neatly pigeon-holed 'as moral turpitude, or a vice, or a sin'. He has also raised the important point, all too often overlooked, that prohibition is a non-justiciable Directive principle. Furthermore, one may pose the question whether it is proper to assign a target date for the achievement of so fundamental a transformation in society as Prohibition implies. What would be the consequences of failure to achieve the target?

It is not merely the financial costs of implementing Prohibition that have to be taken into account in any objective evaluation of the programme but also the social and administrative costs. The administrative machinery today is inadequate even for the implementation of more urgent tasks such as economic development, and it should not be subjected to unnecessary strains. Whatever the absolute ethical merit of total abstention there is none in enforced virtue, as philosophers like T H Green have long ago pointed out -the fact remains that countries such as England, Norway and Sweden, without enforcing prohibition, have higher standards of health and law and order than India. Admittedly, there is a case for regulating the production and sale of alcoholic liquors in the country, but then this could more conveniently take the form of stringent conditions of sale as in the Scandinavian countries rather than of absolute legal prohibition.

As even the Commission has admitted, the magnitude of the drink problem in the country is relatively small. It is only in a few countries such as France that chronic alcoholism has reached the proportion of a public health problem. In the ultimate analysis, the only real corrective to the problem of drink is a rise in the standard of living. Whether one regards prohibition or temperance as the final solution, both alike

should be regarded as a by-product of more fundamental improvements in society.

**Freight Element in Cost**

THE decision of the Indian Coastal Conference, representing all the shipping companies engaged in the Indian coastal trade, to raise freight rates by five per cent with immediate effect, is reported to have been actuated by the increasing costs of operation since the last general rise in shipping freights in 1950. In the absence of complete data, it is difficult to fathom the exact reasons for this so-called rise in operational costs - whether it be due to a rise in port dues or in costs of fuel, labour etc. By itself the cryptic statement about rising costs hardly conveys anything, and the rise in freights could always be attributed to this factor, failing any special reasons.

The structure of freight rates in coastal shipping depends upon slightly more complex factors than those which govern trans-oceanic shipping freights, as for instance, competition from country craft, inland transport etc. The inter-relations of shipping freights are largely a terra incognita even to the professional economist, and there has been no systematic study of the problem since Professor Lewis's pioneering work, based on the data for the inter-War period. In coastal shipping, where the average length of the voyage is shorter and the average proportion of time spent in port proportionately greater, port charges also play an important part in determining freights, though here again it is a question of the relative proportions of the different items such as wage-costs, fuel, port dues etc., which enter into freight rates. It would also be interesting to know how far the suspension in varying degrees of coastal shipping traffic during the monsoon months affects the earnings of the companies concerned and whether this has also been a contributing factor in the rise of freights. Of course, this factor has always been operative in the case of coastal traffic, and its impact cannot be regarded as being particularly severe in any one year. To the extent that the freight rates are governed by periodic decisions of the Indian Coastal Conference, the coastal shipping freight market cannot be regarded as being competitive in any accepted sense of the term. This is a world-wide tendency, and it may not be long before the humble tramp

steamer, the only really competitive element in the shipping freight market, is finally squeezed out.

The Government of India, which has approved the increase in coastal freights, should enlighten the public about the factors that have contributed to the rise in costs of operation. In the context of a developing economy, any increase in costs cannot be conceived in terms of unilateral decisions. When the determination of wage-costs in most industries is a matter of public knowledge, there is no reason why the Government should be so secretive in the case of the freight-element in costs of production.

**Planning for Poultry**

THE FAO Regional Technical Meeting on Poultry Production at Poona last week has focussed attention on India's poultry plans. With the achievement of targets of food-grain production during the first Five Year Plan, we can now pay some attention to increasing the supply of food of a higher nutritive and protective value such as fruits and vegetables, milk and milk products, eggs, fish, meat etc. Development of poultry and egg production must naturally occupy an important place in such concerted efforts if only because their capital requirements are relatively limited and the markets are ready at hand. The disclosure made by Dr Harekrushna Mahatab, Governor of Bombay that a countrywide programme for the development of poultry is to be launched soon will therefore, be very welcome.

The success of the community development projects has apparently weighed in favour of concentration of development effort on limited areas. The scheme proposes, therefore, to establish a net-work of about 300 development blocks for extension of poultry farming on an organised basis. In these blocks, baby chicks imported from abroad or produced from accredited breeds in India will be housed and maintained in Government farms for periods of four to five months before they are distributed to individuals proposing to take up organised poultry farming. Each development block is to have a small government demonstration farm with about a hundred birds. These farms will not only demonstrate to villagers the technical aspects of breeding and maintenance of poultry but assist in marketing the products. Some 60 such farms already exist in the country, housing a total of twenty thousand birds and these will pre-