

Weekly Notes

Reappraisal by Prime Ministers

FROM the communique issued at the conclusion of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, it is apparent that Pandit Nehru and Sir Anthony Eden have convinced their opposite numbers that inevitable developments in Russia call for a reappraisal of the attitude to the East-West conflict. Non-Asian members of the Commonwealth have not turned "neutralist"; nor have they abandoned their faith in regional military pacts. But the Commonwealth as a whole would seem to have accepted the need for a more sympathetic attitude toward Russia. Though the communique is less emphatic about Communist China, it is clear that the Commonwealth is in favour of Red China's admission to the United Nations, and will welcome increased trade relations with that country.

Washington may feel irritated at the Commonwealth's efforts to pursue a foreign policy which is not endorsed fully by it. But some Commonwealth members may have a grievance that the Commonwealth has not emerged definitely as a third force. This raises the problem of the future of the Commonwealth. There are indications that Britain as well as other members are inclined to stress the economic aspect of the Commonwealth link. Satisfaction is expressed in the communique over Britain's "determination" to function as a source of capital for development in the Commonwealth countries. Whether Britain will be able to provide the needed capital, is doubtful. Economic ties are not unimportant. But it is likely that the basic political unity may be a more binding and continuing link. In the "common heritage of parliamentary democracy", the Commonwealth has a dependable foundation. This base will become more solid as the Commonwealth's professed respect for "aspirations for freedom and self-government" is more widely reflected in the transfer of power to the areas which are not yet free.

There is growing doubt about the future of the Commonwealth. Loose-ness and informality of the association have been its strongest points so far. It may, therefore, seem surprising that, at a time when doubts about its future existence are

being expressed, some eminent authorities are arguing the case for a closer and more rigid association. Sardar Panikkar has called for a declaration of Faith by Commonwealth members. He is also in favour of creating a machinery for conciliation, now that the Privy Council has been abolished. To some, these may seem to be risky innovations. No formal or rigid ties can perpetuate the Commonwealth, if the approach to basic social and human problems ceases to be common. It will, or can, survive only as long as it maintains a common approach to fundamental issues.

Side Issues in Food Debate

THERE are interesting side-issues to the food controversy which have got lost in the confusion created by the good imbroglio. Had the controversy been carried on according to approved rules, the question that would arise seriatim are (1) Is it within the competence even of the Planning Commission to alter the targets after they have been fixed? This question was raised by Shri K C Neogy, and appropriately enough, when the Mussoorie conference was in session. The answer to it is 'yes' and 'no'. Yes, because the Plan itself says: 'in view of the considerations outlined in paragraph 10 and especially the need to provide adequate safeguards against possibilities of inflation, it is considered that it is both necessary and possible to achieve higher agricultural targets with relatively small adjustments in regard to resources. With a view to fixing higher targets and ensuring their realisation, the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture propose to undertake further study of agricultural programmes in each State and region with reference to its crop pattern, land and water resources etc.'

But definitely 'no', if the order of magnitude of the proposed increase is borne in mind and the manner of its implementation, through re-allocation of resources. If these are done, what happens to the balances within the Plan and its internal consistency?

The second question that would arise is, what was the basis on which the target was fixed, production possibilities or estimated demand? Again the answer is, 'yes'

and 'no'. Yes, because in the paragraph 10 referred to above, the factors to be considered are laid down as follows:

- (1) increase in the total population,
- (2) increase in the urban population,
- (3) the need to improve per capita consumption,
- (4) the need to counter possibilities of inflationary pressures resulting from the implementation of the Second Five Year Plan, and
- (5) effects on food consumption, of increase in national income and changes in its distribution,

Needless to say that the target, was based on all these considerations the figure arrived at not only happened to be, but had to and did equal the figure which was worked out on the basis of production possibilities. The latter, in turn, suggested the 40 per cent increase also. The increased production in community project blocks and areas served by the N E S as found from two sample surveys in these areas, were put up as the basis for Shri V T Krishnamachari's note that food production could be raised by 40 per cent without any significant increase in investments for agriculture!

Transport Board Strengthened

THE Departmental Standing Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Transport, is now to be strengthened. It is to be expanded by the inclusion of high-level representatives of, among others, the Ministries of Production, Commerce and Industry, Iron and Steel and Defence with the object of undertaking for the first time the co-ordination and advance planning of transport facilities in the light of the requirements of the next two or three years. The immediate concern is the procedure for avoiding congestion in ports which may occur in view of the heavy programme for imports of capital goods.

Government's awareness of the need to co-ordinate transport is revealed by the recent appointment of a Central Authority for the co-ordination of goods movement at all ports in the country in "co-operation with the railways and importers, Shri B C Mullicky Director of Railway Movements, Calcutta, is to be in charge of this organisation.