

sum, exclusive right to a saloon car, especially if rail travel were otherwise denied him. And if this right were made transferable, so that the owners of railway compartments could carry passengers or sub-let them, money in plenty would be forthcoming. The benefit to our national transport system would be enormous. New locomotives and rolling-stock could be manufactured or imported, railway workshops would work to capacity and even expand, creating new employment. Last, but not least, the problem of third-class travel would be solved for good and all.

Bui, the possible applications are endless. Provincial governments desirous of enforcing prohibition and balancing their budgets have only to sell exclusive to the assistance of the police against criminals and their problem is ended. New schools can be built

by applying the same principle to education—and so on.

There remains only the question to what extent these public services could still be regarded as public under the new system. The telephone service, for example, was taken over from private companies by the Government in order that it might be a public as opposed to a private service, that doctors and charitable institutions, for example, might be properly catered for. Whether or not a public service should be run at a loss has been a debatable point, but hitherto it has never been debated whether it should be run on the simple profit motive. The question was never raised. The Ministry of Communications has shown great originality in its suggestion, and we have no doubt that it will be able to meet objections such as these with ease.

Book is adorned by many such dead letters of the law. After two decades of experience of raising the age of marriage by legislation, we would have thought that experience would chasten the will to organise and teach greater patience. Society is shaped and moved largely by forces operating outside the Legislative Chambers: not that law plays no part in the process, but that would be unreal not to accept its obvious limitations.

The new Manu who has been chosen to deliver us from the thrall of inequitable custom was born outside the pale of Hindu society to which he has been made the law-giver. This is perhaps as it should be. To his legal mind the obvious contradictions between the tenets of the Constitution, that declared the equality of every one before it, and the many inequalities sanctioned by custom or by our ancient law-givers, naturally appear to be grievous ones that must be immediately rectified. Had the proposed legislation been confined to this necessary piece of amendment there would not have been so much room for controversy, and Dr. Ambedkar is undoubtedly the fittest man to carry it out. But in his extensive erudition, sociology does not seem to figure very prominently. On the contrary, the logical absolutism which marks his thought and its expression in his published studies makes him a bull in a China shop when it comes to unravelling and straightening out strands of social development that have entangled themselves over the ages. This task, which covers a greater part of the controversial code bill, should better have been left to other times and other agencies.

The Hindu Code Bill

THERE IS SOMETHING about the modern Miss which her elders never cease to condemn and envy. It is her freedom in changing her mind after starting something she wants to stop half-way. Perhaps Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru might be feeling something similar in this business of codifying the Hindu Law, which, growing through the ages has developed so many ramifications that it defies all codification. Pandit Nehru has a habit of succumbing to generous impulses. He must have launched on this thankless and unenviable task in one of his usual moments of thoughtlessness. May be, he is brave enough to tempt the devil and having started on the job, he is not afraid of carrying it through to the bitter end. The gesture of accommodation he showed to the House was prefaced by the challenge that the Government would make an issue of it, and would be prepared to resign if the Hindu Code Bill was thrown out. This brought forth an immediate retort from Acharya Kripalani that if the Government thought of resigning, why not do so on the score of the sugar scandal?

By now, of course, every one is familiar with Pandit Nehru's outbursts. The House has also become conditioned to them and responds in a routine manner. Members were willing to speak against the bill and criticise it, but were reluctant to say 'no' when a division was called. They were willing enough to strike but afraid to wound.

That the Government of the day should think of making an issue of the bill, when the Congress, which is supposed to run the Government, is so much divided about it is a mystery that has never ceased to surprise students of parliamentary procedure. It is not the President of the Congress alone who has openly opposed the measure. The erstwhile President of the Constituent Assembly Babu Rajendra Prasad made no secret of his own feelings on the measure. Those who question the wisdom of hasty social legislation are not necessarily reactionaries. There are no short cuts to securing equality between the sexes, or any of those other highly desirable ends that the Government sponsored bill has in view. The Indian Statute

There is, outside the House, a vague feeling against any attempt to codify what has been, by and large, a moderately successful social adaptation to environment, though, as in the House, the opposition cannot be pinned down to specific issues. That this feeling should be exploited by the anti-Government forces in engineering opposition against the bill is unfortunate, but understandable

enough in the circumstances.

knowing well how divided the Congress was on the subject, Dr. Ambedkar had been reluctant to go ahead until Pandit Nehru promised him the fullest support. This Panditji did, and he will have good reason to complain of being let down if Panditji backs out now. As it is, it must have taken a good deal of Pandit Nehru's persuasive powers to get Dr. Ambedkar to agree to refer the Bill for informal consideration by members of the House, after it has come out of the Select Committee stage. The spirit of accommodation shown so generously to the critics of the bill, however, really concealed a trap. This step was meant to commit them to the broad principles underlying the bill!

So far, 33 members have spoken on the bill, and among them 23 appeared to be definitely in favour of it. During the 30 precious hours, and 28 precious minutes at their disposal, many of the Honourable Members strained their vocal chords, and gave vent to some of their domestic worries. Acharya Kripalani confessed that he supported the bill merely because of pressure from his wife. Dr Pattabhi revealed that he and his wife (good old couple), are eager to get a decree of divorce. But humour apart, none tried to express the popular feeling in the country, nor even to bring into focus the point of attack. No political capital could be made of the bogey that Hindu religion was in danger. At least on the floor of the House, Acharya Kripalani laid this particular ghost very effectively, indeed, when he said, "I am afraid I do not see the point in Hindu religion being in danger, Hindu religion is not in danger when Hindus are thieves, rogues, black marketers and bribe-takers. Hindu religion is not endangered by people who want to reform a particular law. May be, they are over zealous, but it is better to be over zealous in things idealistic than be corrupt in material things." One may not be prepared to go so far with the Acharya that marriages should be

renewable every five years. Even Trade Agreements sometimes last longer! But there is something in what he said about being over zealous.

There is nothing very wrong with Hindu religion, but Hindu society needs a radical overhaul; so do Muslim and Christian Societies, if one chooses to think of society in terms of such compartments. The Hindu Code Bill, seeks to remedy certain anachronisms in the existing system. A daughter who has hitherto been denied a share in her father's property, will now have the same claim to it as her brothers. Will it raise the status of the bulk of our women folk? What about

the responsibility on the parents to find husbands for their daughters and the dowry that goes with it?

The most revolutionary part of the Code is of course that relating to monogamy and divorce. Hitherto a luxury denied to the upper castes, it may now be open only to them. The so called lower classes who have managed their matrimonial affairs fairly satisfactorily, may now find their freedom gone, if the new code does not remain a dead letter so far as their own problems were concerned.

Dr Ambedkar's bill does not of course, pretend to solve all the

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problems of Hindu society at one stroke. Even so, there is a fairly widespread demand to drop it, not on its merits, but on the ground—and a just ground, too—that a microscopic minority has

no moral right to impose its own notions on society. This is not to deny that those who oppose all social changes are clearly in a minority, and a minority that is fast fading into insignificance.

The real criticism of the bill is that in the, main it is fighting with shadows and thereby diverting attention from the realities.

Weekly Notes

Minimum Wages

THE MINIMUM Wages Act of 1948, it is now learnt, may be put into force by the Government of India by March next. The Act provides for fixation of minimum wages in certain employments where "sweated labour is most prevalent, or where there is a big chance of exploitation of labour." Attached to the Act was a schedule of industries, specially chosen for its operation. The institution of a Central Board to advise what would be the minimum wages, was, of course, a necessary preliminary, and has now been completed. The Government have also appointed the Director of the Labour Bureau, Minister of Labour, as a "competent authority" under the Act, who is to ascertain from time to time the cost of living index numbers and the basis on which the minimum wage is to be fixed. The Provincial Governments have also been asked to appoint similar competent authorities in the provinces. It does not look likely now that a start will be made with wages of agricultural labour as it was thought previously, though pilot schemes or sample surveys for preliminary investigation for the purpose were reported to have been started.

Mysore Gold

GOLD MINES, paradoxically enough, have not been very paying of late. This is because costs have gone up, but the selling price of gold in most countries is controlled. The official rate at which the produce of the mines is taken over by the Government or the Central Bank, leaves little enough margin. Hence South Africa's long standing agitation for a revision of the price of freshly mined gold.

But by this token, gold mining

should have been paying in Mysore; the mine owners complain, nevertheless, that it is not, with the result that production has nearly declined to half of what it was before the war. This was because, among other things, the royalties payable made it unprofitable to work the lower grade seams; adjustments were effected sometime ago to remove this particular grievance.

Another shadow now threatens to fall on the Mysore goldfields. When the fiscal integration of the Mysore State with the Indian Union is finally effected—it would be completed within the next one year—and the rate of company taxation there is brought up to the Indian Union level, as it must be, it will not pay to work the mines. The gold mining companies, therefore, want some special concession in the shape of exemption from taxation of a proportionate share of the profits attributable to extensions undertaken after, say, April 1948. The argument is that gold mining is given a preferential treatment in every gold producing country.

The other side of the case is naturally kept in the dark by those who advocate this special treatment. Producers of gold in the countries which are members of the International Monetary Fund do not enjoy the privilege of selling it in a 'free' market. How the continuation of a free market in gold is reconciled with India's membership of the I.M.F. remains a mystery. Assuming that such a free market may be permitted because it does not interfere in any way with foreign exchange operations and is wholly innocuous, it still remains to be explained why the Reserve Bank should not exercise their right of acquiring internally produced gold at the

official rate. This is obligatory for every member of the I.M.F.; the membership! of the latter demands that the currency authority of the country should not engage in or permit non-monetary transactions in gold. The Reserve Bank could get away with it when selling Hyderabad gold on the ground that it was the personal property of H.H. The Nizam, and that the Bank were merely acting as agents for the latter. But no such argument holds for Mysore gold.

Linking up Assam

THE ASSAM rail link is at last completed. It would be now possible to go by rail from any where in the Indian Union to Assam without passing through Pakistan territory. The journey from Calcutta or from Bihar by this new rail route, needless to say, would be a circuitous one, almost like covering three-fourths of a circle to connect the end points. The journey from Calcutta to Amingaon, the terminal point for Gauhati, or for the motor road to Shillong, will take nearly twice as long by the new route. Even the journey from

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