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THE DARK SPOTS

THE Advisory Council for Industries met in a conference in New Delhi and parted without arriving at any concrete decisions that could be placed before the country at large or even before the Government. This was not unexpected because the problems facing the Government, on which the advice of the Council was presumably sought, were so many and various that it could not conceivably be possible for such a heterogeneous body to dispose of their business with quickness and despatch. That the composition of the Council should be so varied cannot itself be a fit point for criticism; quite the contrary in fact, if the different elements brought together are to represent a variety of interests and present a cross section of the large and heterogeneous groups who are vitally concerned with some aspect or other of our industries, directly or indirectly.

Whatever the means chosen for the purpose,—we are not yet aware of the precise role that the Advisory Council is supposed to play, we do presume that all discussions of industrial problems at whatever level, and in whatever stage,—be it in committees of experts, advisory bodies or in purely inter-departmental conferences, can have only one goal in view, viz. to devise the concrete measures that will implement most effectively the industrial policy of the Government enunciated in their policy statement of April, 1948. This statement stands; the ends have been defined, the functions of advisory and expert bodies can only be to suggest the means.

The Government do Recognise, that their main objective is to secure the maximum increase in production and that it will not be realised merely by defining the respective spheres of State and private enterprise, nor by framing regulations,—we may add, unless these regulations? eliminate the friction, hold-ups, dislocations and the plethora of inertia which have embedded the wheels of industry in a slough of despond

It is also clear that measures of regulation and control apart, the industrial policy of the Government must stand in such relation to the export and import policies and to the broad lines of the system of taxation and monetary management, that the latter may not work at cross purposes, or slow down the tempo of economic activity as a whole.

At the moment the sharpest conflicts, and certainly the most vocal protests, have arisen in these very fields. So many complaints are being heard and from so many directions that it may clear the air if we tried to sort them put and arrange them in order. It would be better to start from the end which is the nearest to the public mind and, therefore, of the most immediate public concern, viz. the end of production. Recent trends in production it is claimed, show that further deterioration has been arrested. The indices, however, are not so clear that the trend has definitely been reversed or that we are likely to make the grade in the not too distant future.

Why has production not been looking up? This question is on everybody's lips. If one listens patiently to the long list of grievances put forward by our industries, one begins to doubt whether there is any shortage of goods in this country at all. For the industrialists complain, and complain bitterly, that Government have stepped down store purchases, even though the latter step has been taken with the unexceptionable intention of fighting inflation. They want the Government to go on buying whatever they produce, irrespective of price or quality. They want the Government to supply them with raw materials at a low price, imported materials included, and at the same time they want the freedom to export to take advantage of the high prices ruling in the foreign markets.

Does it not amount to the demand that exports should be subsidised, irrespective of whether Government are, as a matter of fact, in a position to foot the bill, merely to fill the pockets of a few people and not in response to the larger purposes of the nation nor for the wider interest of the people?

Most unsavoury is the complaint that Indian manufactured goods are not patronised by the Indian consumers because there is no standardisation of quality and the purchaser never feels sure that he will get what he wants or that he will have value for his money. This is unfortunately the case with many of our products, for fine chemicals, engineering goods, etc.; in short, for all industries where the maintenance of standard quality is the *sine qua non* of success. By doing anything at all for helping such industries without first assuring maintenance of the proper quality and standards by setting up appropriate organisations for the purpose, are we not putting the cart before the horse and making a sorry mess of the whole affair?

By launching upon the programme of industrialisation and taking upon themselves the task of fostering industries the Government of the country discharge one of their essential and primary functions. But in doing so, they also take upon themselves grave responsibilities. For it is ultimately the people who provide what the Government dispense, and the Government have, therefore, to ensure, as best as they can, that our resources are not frittered away on wasteful efforts, for building up an outwardly imposing structure on a foundation which is not strong enough to bear its weight. Spohn-feeding does not make for strength or vigour.

BIGGEST NATIONALISED INDUSTRY

IN this strange world, one occasionally discovers strange bed-fellows. Sir Jeremy Raiman will perhaps, resent the insinuation that he is a socialist or a state collectivism. Yet, in his last budget speech, he supported gradual nationalisation on the strangest of strange pleas that it would replenish the Exchequer through taxation of such state-owned activities. Many eyebrows were then raised at Sir Jeremy's futuristic calculus.

Much water has since flowed down the Ganges. India is now a free and independent country; there