

From South India

Miasma Around The Metropolis

HANDLOOMS continue to hit the headlines in the South. There have been demonstrations and there have been deputations, flights of ministers to Delhi and promises of more allotment of yarn to starving weavers. Suggestions have been made that Madras should be treated separately and that she should have no part in, or truck with, the pool system. Indeed such a stir has been created in the South that some people in the North may well protest that handloom weaving is not the exclusive monopoly of the State of Madras.

Authority in these days concerns itself primarily with the distribution of goods in short supply and less with production, which depends not merely on human effort, but also on something else. There comes the rub. Nature combines with Neptune to rob the seasons of their customary liberality and monsoons have gone dry for three years and more without even an effort on their part to play the game. The result has been bad all round. There is an excess of humidity still in the air, however, but it only spreads miasma all round Metropolitan Madras.

The budget session goes on along its appointed course. The budget speech delivered by the Finance Minister had no surprises. There is to be no further taxation a pre-election precaution. The allotted days will pass off in debate; members will make their suggestions. A feeble opposition interjects a jarring note here and there, but it is muffled by the noise of the majority, for we are a democracy. And having discharged their duty as the watchdogs of the country's finance and eased their conscience, the members will disperse.

The importance attached to the budget once upon a time has vanished. It is now a routine affair. The Congress Party chief of Tamilnad is often away during the budget debate. That is a fair measure of the importance attached to the budget session. The Legislature, party met earlier, and discussed the Working Committee resolution about Mr. Prakasam. It went a step further and censured him. It could not silence him, however, for the "Lion of Andhra" continued his diatribes against the Government during the budget debate, notably for its fail-

ure to infuse vigour and life into the villages. He also criticised the Government for tampering with the producer co-operatives inaugurated during his regime.

The common man for all this continues to be indifferent. He crowds the soloons and the cinemas and disports a shark-skin bush coat, if he is well to do. If he is not, he goes about his routine job in a dull way. The less enterprising of the middle (lass, the main pillar of the social structure, attend their offices after strap-hanging in the ramshackle bus of the State Transport when crowded out from the screeching trams, negotiations for the purchase, of which are still going on.

Food and water, and of course, accommodation, are in short supply. Nor is the air pure. And yet the common man is called upon to subscribe out of his toil 19 crores for further railway equipment and future development. He has to pay his local and State taxes, and in addition, the Union tax. Willy-nilly he does, and through the nose, literally. For, every puff through that anatomical protrusion is to cost him more from April I.

Coming to food, the sales tax on foodgrain is still there. Even the lowliest is, therefore, hit on his stomach. The extra cost of grain at 8 as. a maund is again intended to give the exchequer over a crore of rupees. The sugar muddle in the State is well known. Many in the villages have forgotten the taste of sugar. While in the adjacent State of Bombay, in the Deccan factories, sugar is crowding the godowns and managements are feeling the pinch because crores of rupees are locked up in consequence. In Madras, the T.U.C.S. depots, sometime ago, limited the distribution to a part of the ration quota. Enquiries revealed that no such directive had been issued by the Authorities. A careful probe showed that stocks were received and were found in the godown, but since the books and registers did not show the stock, sugar was not issued as shown on the ration card. Verily, a victory for red tape.

Our P.M. wants constructive criticism and deplores bad taste. It is up to the merchants and officials alike to realise the import of his

advice and take necessary steps to promote harmony in trade while ensuring the citizen his minimum needs. But what have the merchants done?

"On the Deepavali Day merchants in the city who did not like control of gur sold gur mixed with cowdung" Though no such particular incident had been reported, such adulteration of food stuffs often took place, an official stated—says a P.T.I. news report.

Meantime, it is gratifying to learn that the California Institute of Technology which has developed a multi-purpose food (M.P.F.) to provide at minimum cost (3 cents) and at minimum bulk (2 oz.) a highly nourishing, palatable, protein food, fortified with vitamins and minerals, is interested in having a similar type of food developed in India from indigenous materials for use in times of emergency. This Institute and the Watumull foundation have sponsored a research project in the Food Technology section of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, for exploring the possibility of utilising oil cakes for this purpose.

Was it coincidence, or is there more than meets the eye that Deshmukh's taxation proposals should follow so closely the Truman tax plan. The US Administration proposed a 4 billion dollar increase, in personal income taxes, adding 4 dollars in new taxes for every 100 dollars of income, a 3 billion dollar increase in Corporation taxes, and another 3 billion dollar selective increase in excise taxes on non-essential consumer products. The articles are gasoline, cigarettes, whiskey, etc. The similarity in Deshmukh's tax proposals is too close to be quite accidental.

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The party meeting that decided to censure Mr. T. Prakasam was attended by just more than 50 per cent, of the members—112 out of 200.

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