

Weekly Notes

Working Part Goes Half Way

There has been unconscionable delay in the publication of the Working Party report on the Cotton Textiles Industry. The full text of the report has not yet been made available to the press. But the press summary tends to confirm the major criticisms levelled against the cotton mills and worse still, what had long been suspected, viz, that it lacks resources for replacing and rehabilitating plant and machinery, even in 15 years. The Working Party, however, has still faith in the ability of the industry of putting its house in order by its own efforts. Beginning from utter lack of any rationale in production evident from a confusion of varieties of products and types of machinery used, some wholly uneconomical and preserved from extinction by the system of controlled distribution, to purchase and sales in which the Working Party recommends that Managing Agents should have no indirect financial interests, the general tenor of recommendations runs counter to this belief.

The report breaks new ground in raising the question of scientific assessment of work loads for the industry and by recommending that high priority should be given to it. The Working Party, therefore, shows more sweet reasonableness than realism when it says that the regulation of output in mills should preferably come from the industry itself. In thinking that the mill-owners' organisation should be able to organise production any better

or that bulk purchase should be financed from a Central Fund presumably to be set up by the Government, the Committee only goes half way towards the solution. The press summary of the recommendations reads like preparations for a journey which the Working Party does not finally undertake. These all point to only one solution for the cotton textile industry, the setting up of a Statutory Corporation for supervision and control' as suggested in this paper some time ago. Bulk purchase, replacement of machinery at the cheapest cost, elimination of wastage and unnecessary commissions on purchase and sale, all these need to be supervised by a competent body and effectively controlled. If finally the Government is to come to the rescue of the industry by providing funds for rehabilitation which the industry has not got, control by such a Corporation is essential to ensure that resources are utilised in the most effective manner, the benefits of bulk purchase are fully utilized and more cloth, and cloth of a better quality is produced at progressively lower cost. In the absence of a Statutory Corporation to do all this, the industry which has been built up at the cost of years of sacrifice and labour will soon be reduced to a junk heap. The Working Party report will serve no purpose unless attention is focussed on this crucial issue and an effective solution is evolved by setting up such a Statutory Corporation.

How Rich Are Our Forests ?

The statistics of forests, formerly confined to the provinces of British India and the centrally administered areas, have now a wider coverage. They show that out of 1.27 mn sq miles of Indian territory, forests cover some .24 mn sq miles—or about 19 per cent of the total. For the same year, 1949-50, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture's "Indian Agricultural Statistics" places the forest area at 93.14 million acres or 0.145 million square miles. This figure is not even as large as the area reported by the "Forest Statistics" of forests owned by Forest Department and Civil Authorities, though considerably in

excess of the area of Reserve Forests. Of this area fully one-third is owned by private individuals—largely unclassed. The rest is owned by Forest Department and civil authorities, and corporate bodies. The bulk of the Forest Department's forests are protected—though miscreants are hard to remove from them.

The major forest produce are limber, roundwood, pulpwood, firewood and charcoal. In 1949-50, the most recent issue of the *Indian Forest Statistics* of which certain details are published in the January number of the *Agricultural Situation in India*, gave the value of the total outturn of timber, roundwood and firewood as Rs 11 crores only. To this can be added another Rs 3 crores on account of firewood and charcoal. In the same year, minor forest produce (animal products, bamboos and canes, drugs and spices, fibre and flosses, fodder and grazing, gums and resins, lac, rubber and latex, etc) yielded a total outturn of another Rs 4.2 crores. A total outturn of Rs 18.2 crores from an area of 0.24 million square miles yields an average of less than Rs 800 per square mile. It is not possible to say if these values include fully the outturn of forest areas under the ownership and control of private individuals. Also one would like to know the basis of evaluation of the produce. Nevertheless, these figures do suggest that our forest wealth is exploited either very poorly or in an extremely short-sighted manner.

The usual practice followed by the State Governments is to lease out defined forest areas to private contractors for a consideration fixed in advance. The contractors' job is not a very easy one and profits are not always assured. In many cases inexperienced adventurers not only waste their own capital but that of the nation also. This is no plea for State control of forest produce. But the revenue from forests can be farmed more imaginatively. Corruption in the allotment of forest contracts, blind exploitation of forest wealth and the unchecked flow of profits from a national asset into hands that only know how to squander it are some of the evils which demand early removal.

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