

### Family Incomes of Calcutta College Students

WHILE the middle-class has been hit everywhere, it is in West Bengal that it has been hit hardest. The appalling incidence of the crisis on the coming generation, high lighted by an abnormal rise in the percentage of failures in University examination in recent years, prompted the Bengali daily *Satyayug* to institute an enquiry into the household budgets of the families of college students, in Calcutta and elsewhere in West Bengal. The results have now been brought out in the form of a monograph. The sample collected is small, there are other deficiencies which were almost inevitable in the absence of assistance from the Government or eminent research organisations. Despite its many limitations considered purely as a sample survey, the value of the study; in view of the light it throws on an acute social problem, can be scarcely over-estimated.

The average incomes of half the families to which West Bengal college students belong is Rs 240 per month while the average expenditure comes to Rs 287. This alone does not show how the middle class is being dragged to ruin. Seven per cent of the families have an income of Rs 100 or less. No more than 22 per cent of the students

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have a room where they can study

Conditions outside Calcutta are only slightly better,

The enquiry covered some 1600 families out of which budgets of 158 were studied, 130 in Calcutta and 20 in the mofussil. The income range of the families studied was Rs 0 to Rs 500. 55 per cent of the families in Calcutta had an income of Rs 300 or less per month, 10 per cent of the families had an income of Rs 100 or less.

In West Bengal, nearly 36 per cent of the total number of students belong to families with an income of Rs-200 less per month. About 62 per cent are from families with an income of Rs 300 or less. The average family in all the income ranges showed a deficit budget

The pattern of expenditure shows that an inordinately large proportion is spent on food (54 per cent of expenditure or 65 per cent of income). Expenditure on education amounts to 19 per cent of the income or 16 per cent of the total expenditure. More than 25 per cent of the income of families whose monthly income does not exceed Rs 200 is spent on education. It is difficult to imagine how families whose monthly income does not exceed Rs 100 can be spending anything on university education. Yet such families spent more than a quarter of their income on this item.

Of the families studied, 58 per

group Rs 401-500 are escape the burden of debt, ;

The situation that the study reveals is, indeed, ripe for a social revolution. One hopes with Prof Gyanchand, who has written a poignant foreword to it, "that " personal sufferings of so many thousands; of intelligent and sensitive young and women would give them a keen interest in an understanding of real issues and create among a large number of them an intense desire to deal with them as adequately as possible." Also that the study which shows within its limits what our college students and their families are going through in the existing circumstances, "should, besides revealing the suffering of young students, stimulate an interest in similar studies all over the country and make it possible for us to have a nation-wide picture of the effects on the growing generation of the increasing stresses of our national economy,"

### Caustic Soda Plant

A SCHEME for setting up a factory for the manufacture of caustic soda and soda ash has been submitted by the Government of Saurashtra to the Centre. The proposed plant is to have a capacity of 50,000 tons of soda ash and 55,000 tons of caustic soda per year. This should meet the major portion of the demand for these chemicals for industries like glass, textiles, soap, paper and rayon in the country. Jaffrabad on the south-east coast of the Kathiawar Peninsula has been recommended by the Saurashtra Government for the location of the plant.

The scheme is to cost Rs 7 crores, of which Rs 4 crores will be the foreign exchange expenditure. The plant will be ready for production within three years after the scheme is sanctioned. A return of 30 per cent is expected on the book capital investment. The Sanrashtra Government has proposed that the project should be taken up by the Central or the State Government either independently or in cooperation with some private party.

Indigenous production and imports of caustic soda and soda ash in recent years were as follows:

	Imports (in tons)	
	Caustic Soda	Soda Ash
1948-49	90,616	165,567
1949-50	12,989	12,295
1950-51	22,000	20,817
1951-52	61,840	85,315

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	Procluction (in tons);	
	Caustic Soda	Soda Ash
1949	7,315	17,913
1950	10,846	43,790
1951	14,722	47,528
1952 (Jan-June) -une)	7,956	16,896

The figures of import do not, however, indicate the actual demand, particularly for caustic soda, restrictions on the import of which have varied widely from time to time. The Planning Commission's Programmes of Industrial Development estimated the demand for caustic soda in 1951 at 54,000 tons. After taking into consideration planned or prospective expansion of production in the industries using caustic soda as a raw material, the estimated demand for 1955-56 was placed at 87,000 tons.

With current production capacity at about 20,000 tons, there is certainly scope for another plant. One difficulty, however, is the utilisation of the chlorine which is produced in the electrolytic process of the manufacture of caustic soda. Another is the question of location. There are already too many plants concentrated in the same area which raises problems of its own—scarcity of water, transport, distribution of the product, etc.

Demand for chlorine is insufficient and the Planning Commission had therefore pointed out that, "Till means for its utilisation are developed both intensively and extensively it might not be desirable to let new electrolytic caustic soda plants to come into existence, unless such schemes also provide for utilisation of chlorine". The National Chemical Laboratory announced a method it had evolved for the preparation of phosphate fertiliser by the action of hydrochloric acid on phosphatic nodules from Trichinopoly (see the issue of May 9, 1953, p 552) and this may help to increase the demand for chlorine. But development of such inter-dependent industries can hardly be taken for granted; in any case it would take time and the Planning Commission had recommended that "unless the increasing demand for chlorine justified the installation of additional and larger electrolytic caustic soda plants, the chemical process based on causticisation of soda ash would have to be adopted". From the fact that soda ash is also to be produced at the plant, it is to be presumed that the chemical process will be utilised and hence, the difficulty anticipated by

the Planning Commission will not arise.

For soda ash, the Tariff Board had estimated the demand in 1951 at 115,000 tons. This is expected to increase to 155,000 tons by 1955-56, apart from any soda ash produced for conversion into caustic soda. The Programmes had recommended that a committee of technical experts should be immediately set up to survey all the possible locations for new plants and to prepare project reports. Jafrabad was mentioned there as one of the possible locations. The soda ash industry was granted protection in 1950.

For caustic soda, the Programmes had pointed out that, "there might be no alternative but to meet the deficit by imports, which at the cif price of Rs 25 per CWT of caustic soda would require about Rs 7.7 crores." There will, therefore, be a considerable saving of foreign exchange with the establishment of the factory and supplies of these two important chemicals will also be assured.

#### Success at Sindri

THAT Sindri should show a net profit, however small, for its initial working period, after making adequate provision for depreciation, renewals and replacements and partial write-off of developmental expenditure, is certainly "a matter of satisfaction" as the Chairman. Sini A K Chanda pointed out at the Annual General Meeting; of Sindri Fertilisers and Chemicals Limited this week. Who were the shareholders present at the annual meeting- to listen to him. one should not perhaps ask. But it was a speech in the grand manner of Company Chairman except that it did not close with the usual invitation, "Now gentlemen, if you have any questions to ask, I shall try to answer them to the best of my ability." Instead, Shri Chanda patted his company on the back!

Not without justification, perhaps the difficulties which the enterprise faced even before it came into existence and the higher cost of construction as compared with the original estimates had given rise to the fear that the concern would prove to be a white elephant. Since it went into production in March 1952, it also had to face a lack of demand, which it had not bargained for. It did not slacken in its efforts to increase production to the target level, thanks to its not being a commercial concern. Early this year, the price of ammonium sul-

phate was reduced from Rs 350 per ton to Rs 285. During the first 13 months of its working from March 1952, Sindri contributed to the fertiliser pool, by selling to it at a price cheaper than that of imported sulphate., even when the price it got was Rs 350 per ton.

Shri Chanda points out the difficulties which still remain. "A certain measure of unbalance in production facilities have come to notice, existing, maintenance arrangements have proved to be inadequate to current requirements, and the technical efficiency, and therefore productivity of labour has fallen short of expectations".

There are also a number of plans for development in the future. The calcium carbonate sludge, obtained as a by-product, is to be sold to the Associated Cement Companies Limited for the manufacture of cement. A factory capable of manufacturing 600 tons of cement per annum is to be set up at Sindri. This will improve the financial position of the company. Coke, ovens for the production of 600 tons of coke a day are to be set up in order to make Sindri self-sufficient in coke and an agreement has been entered into with a German firm for the supply and installation of the plant. There are plans for the utilisation of the coke oven gases that will be produced, for the manufacture of urea and ammonium nitrate.

In view of the difficulties which have still to be overcome and the plans for expansion on hand, it is to be regretted that Shri B C Mukharji, who was Managing Director of Sindri since its inception should leave that post at this crucial stage. His appointment as the Chairman of Indian Airlines is, no doubt, a well merited recognition of his successful management of Sindri, but it is very doubtful whether Sindri can spare him. Only recently he visited Japan, North America, the UK and various other European countries as a member of the joint technical team of TCA and the Government of India to study modern techniques in the production of fertiliser, particularly urea and ammonium nitrate. The gain of Indian Airlines will be certainly a heavy loss for Sindri Fertilisers.

Our civil servants continue to be journalists, good for any assignment. This was allright in the old days. But for undertakings like Sindri, experience should count and should not be treated in so cavalier a fashion.