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Crossing the Barrier

THE National Development Council is an august body. Chief Ministers of all the States are on it, so are Members of the Planning Commission, and it has the Prime Minister as its Chairman. Central Ministers in a body with their deputies attend its session by invitation. Its purpose was and is to get the fullest support of State Governments for the objectives, priorities and programmes of the Plan. It meets only once a year and at its first meeting two years ago, it passed a resolution expressing the determination of the States in co-operation with the Central Government to carry out the National Plan and call upon the citizens of India to work for its fulfilment. Meeting again about this time last year, when the country was under the shadow of unemployment, it approved a supplementary plan with a view to relieving unemployment through increased expenditure, on education and other services. It met this year to consider the procedure and principles to be followed in formulating the Second Five-Year Plan. The agenda, however, was fairly wide, for the Council had also to review the progress of the Plan, Community Projects, National Extension Service and Land Reform and consider the employment situation in the country among other things.

Considering the composition of the Council and the atmosphere in which it meets, with Ministers and Deputies in attendance, backed by the serried ranks of officials and advisers, it was not surprising that Pandit Nehru should have felt somewhat overwhelmed by this imposing spectacle of authority and officialdom. He prefaced his address with the sensible observation that the first requisite of a Plan was that the relevant, meetings too should be planned so that they might be in a better position to discuss matters. This could not be done in a huge crowd. All that they could do was to deliver speeches to each other or at each other—not a very felicitous opening, however sensible the observation might otherwise be, in view of the occasion.

The Council has concluded its deliberations. The Chief Ministers; have departed with their aides, and the Planning Commission Members and officials have gone back to their desks. A "considerable volume of literature has been released to the press about the proceedings at the session, from which much can be elicited save what the Council met to consider and decide. It is not that enough time has not elapsed to enable one to digest this mass of material and distil its essence. But nothing particularly new has been made known: there are no new facts as such and no hidden inter-relationship between facts has been brought out either.

Yet since the National Development Council is such an august body and its meeting was so important, it is necessary to sort out the different strands of thought in the deliberations and piece them together in the hope of getting an idea of the new direction which the highest dignitaries of the State want the country to follow. Pandit Nehru sketched out the outlines of a socialist economy, which had captured his imagination in the early thirties. But there was a stress and an emphasis on the relative importance of the public sector which was new and caused

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