ONE cannot talk politics, either in the towns or the countryside, without quickly coming to such concepts as 'social reform', 'development', 'uplift' and other analogous terms, all of which imply that the present social and economic system is unsatisfactory and has to be changed. But the politicians are not the only persons concerned with social reform and economic development. There are innumerable societies and official or semi-official organizations whose purpose is social work. Few of these are mere charitable bodies concerned with palliating distress: they aim at reform and education. Among the middle classes and the intelligentsia (but not, in my experience, among the peasants) there is a radical outlook: an assumption that change is good and that it is the duty of the middle classes to improve the lot of the poor. There are, no doubt, variations in the sincerity with which these opinions are held: out there is no-one among those I have met (apart from some officials letting their hair down) who disputes the Tightness of this attitude. In India to be called a 'do-gooder' would not be considered slighting.

There are conservatives. But their conservatism appears more in deeds than in words, and no-one has appeared on the post-Independence stage in Orissa with a manifesto proclaiming the Tightness of the present state of society and deploving change. The Ganatantra Parishad is commonly labelled right-wing 'reactionary' (the abusive equivalent of 'conservative'), but the programme which that party put out at the time when it had an alliance with the Praja Socialists in the Orissa Assembly, was more radical than that of the Congress. Manifestos, the cynics say, are merely words on paper. But that is another question and does not alter the fact that the climate of political opinion at present does not permit open opposition to social change. If there are conservatives, they object not to change itself, but to the pace of change: or they argue that certain elements in the radical programme, such as 'social justice' and 'economic development' may in the present conditions be incompatible with one another.

Social reform, whether strictly social as in the attempt to weaken the caste system, or whether concerned with agrarian reform and economic improvement, has been intermingled with the purely political causes of Oriya Nationalism and the Independence Movement. 'Political freedom cannot be the end. It is an inevitable intermediate stage which has to be crossed in order to reach the social objectives of the nation.' (Dhebar, quoted in History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa ed H K Mahatab. Cuttack, 1957. Vol IV, p1.) But looking at Orissa politics in the last three decades, it seems that social reform and economic change have often taken second place to the main political aim of power, and by some politicians these reforms are regarded not even as secondary ends, but merely as one way of making mass contact and gaining or retaining power.

Material and Moral Change

There are two main categories in which these reformist activities fall: one material and the other moral. These poles are represented in contemporary India by the Five Year Plans at one end and at the other by the work of Vinoba Bhave. One is concerned with man's virtue: the other with his material well-being. The moral reformers are, on the whole, not a success in party politics. Certain 'moral' reforms—for instance the abolition of untouchability and the introduction of prohibition—have been attempted through legislative means. But on the whole men of this inclination work lower down in the power hierarchy: they are fieldworkers, and their techniques are precept, example, and preaching. In higher politics, in the field of manoeuvre and manipulation and bargaining, they tend to be helpless and may even be used by those who are more skilled at political manoeuvring. But even by those who think that such work is a waste of time, they are held as individuals in great respect.

The other wing of social and agrarian reform is led by those who attempt to change society not by working on individual minds, but by changing the structure of society through legislation. Their attack is upon institutions, or privileged classes, and they seek through these changes to bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth and at the same time increase the total wealth.

In between these two extremes is a type of activity, the primary aim of which is economic improvement but not by means of centrally directed projects involving a heavy expenditure of capital. Examples would be the work of such institutions as the Khadi and Village Industries Board, and, at an earlier date, some of the items in the Congress list of constructive work. These categories refer to activities rather than to persons. Every senior Congress politician has had experience of all three types of work. But differences arise over which type of activity is the more fundamental.

Reformers and the Administration

There were social and economic reform movements in Orissa before the Congress came onto the scene. Their inspiration, I was told, was derived from similar movements in Bengal. There were attacks upon the caste system, and upon the custom of paying dowries, and symbolic reforms such as introducing the social innovation of retaining moustaches alone and shaving off the beard—an innovation which was a red rag to the bull in the then conservative Brahmin Sasans in the Puri district as elsewhere in Orissa. (Mahatab, op cit, Vol III App B pp 23-24.) But in the main these reformers worked through two means: they started vernacular newspapers and they opened schools.

An example is the Satyabadi School in Puri District, opened by Gopabandhu Das in 1909. Many of those who supported these schools and who taught in them were also active members of the Utkal Sammilani. The Oriya school at Chakradharpur in Singhbhum district was started by the founder of the Satyabadi school.

F G Bailey

Social and Economic Reform
If the Vanaspati Industry were to close down and there were no DALDA, the immediate effect would be a serious scarcity of hard fats—fats like vanaspati and ghee which don’t melt at room temperatures.

ECONOMIST: A scarcity of about three lakh tons at once—four times that in 15 years.

YOU: So...?

ECONOMIST: So this would obviously mean shortages. Ghee, the traditional hard fat, will be unable to make good the shortfall. It has never been able to meet its own growing demand—let alone the extra demand for vanaspati. Historically speaking, there has been only a marginal increase in ghee production in the past 20 years, considering the increase in population.

WE: And that is precisely why DALDA Vanaspati came into the market 30 years ago and has stayed there.

ECONOMIST: Looking a little into the future, the supply of ghee is expected to rise by about 20%, in the next 5-10 years. But the demand for it would have increased by more than that. Meanwhile, the demand for vanaspati could easily double.

YOU: But I can’t see why the demand for vanaspati should increase.

ECONOMIST: Firstly, because of the increase in population. Secondly, because of the rise in National Income. As incomes grow, more and more hard fats tend to be consumed. Forty percent of the American diet for instance, consists of fat.

WE: Another thing. Without DALDA Vanaspati in the shops the price of ghee will go up to prohibitive levels. Few will be able to afford it. So, a great many people will have to do with a lot less of fat.

ECONOMIST: And our diet is already deficient in fat. We take, on an average, only 1/4 of our nutritional requirements of it.

WE: What about adulteration? It’s a common practice as it is. And it will grow—with all its harmful effects on health.

ECONOMIST: That apart, fat scarcity would divert a great deal of available milk to the production of cooking fat. This, in a country already short of milk, where malnutrition among children is a grave problem.

YOU: Aren’t you dramatizing it a little... we could use liquid oils, you know!

WE: Of course, we could. But then think of the changes in eating habits—in cooking methods and the taste of foods in hard fat areas like the Punjab, for instance. It would mean getting used to strange tasting, unappetising foods, having to forego meals cooked in traditional ways. And foods such as cakes and biscuits cannot be made without hard fats like DALDA. More important, people all over will need extra vitamins to supplement their diet.

YOU: Why vitamins?

WE: Well, because liquid edible oils don’t contain vitamins A and D—DALDA Vanaspati does. DALDA consists of partially hydrogenated pure vegetable oils, fortified with 700 International Units of Vitamin A and 56 IU of Vitamin D. These vitamins protect the skin and eyes, and build strong bones and healthy teeth. They are essential for health, growth and protection from disease. As a source of energy, DALDA is 21/2 times better than wheat or rice. Moreover, it is hygienically pure, deodorised, of uniformly high quality—yet so economical in use! It isn’t often that you get these qualities in liquid oils—they certainly never contain vitamins.

YOU: That’s perhaps why the demand for DALDA is going up more sharply than that for liquid oils.

ECONOMIST: A final point. Without the Vanaspati Industry, thousands of people would be without a means of livelihood. And the National Income would be less by some crores of rupees.

YOU: And I’d be without my DALDA! We’ve been using it for years. I knew it was a food, but I didn’t know that it played quite so important a part in the Economy and food habits of the people.
These reformers became involved in Nationalist politics. Gopabandhu Das brought the Congress to Orissa. The Satyabadi School became a National School. Das himself was elected a member of the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, and the latter part of his life (he died in 1928) was spent in what we can recognize as typical activities of the Congress politicians of those days: educational work, publishing a vernacular newspaper, organizing flood relief, leading protest meetings against various Government measures, from time to time defying the law and going to prison. Yet he remained primarily a social worker and a reformer, and the paper which he began, the Oriya-language Samaj, went not to a political party but to the Servants of the People Society, of which Das was a member.

Filled a Gap

The work which was undertaken by this Satyabadi group and others like it filled a gap left in the Administration's activities. This is true especially of the work of social reform, for the Government was extremely cautious about interfering with social and religious customs, and the British were the last people to attempt to challenge the prestige of, for instance, the Puri Brahmans, by bringing into dispute the symbols of their superiority. Even the present Government has not an entirely free hand in such affairs. But in other fields, education for instance, one might have expected the Government of the day to play a greater part. Government did support the Satyabadi school until it became a national school, but the initiative in starting such institutions came from individuals in the middle-class and not from officials. Still more would we have expected such emergency work as flood relief to be carried on by official agencies, but these were then, as now and always, apt to be slow, off the mark and reluctant to recognize any situation which was outside their normal routine.

In one way these social reformers were ancillary to the officials: they did work which we would today recognize as the responsibility of the Government. But the nature of this work also determined the mutual attitudes of Government and social reformers. From the Government side the social reformers, in so far as they upset people of influence and importance, must have seemed a nuisance: still more so when they attacked officials for having failed to do their jobs efficiently. They seemed, no doubt, to be at best busybodies and more often agitators. This is not to say that the British looked with disapproval on such educational work that was done at the Satyabadi School. On the contrary the School was visited by high officials and much interest was taken in its experimental methods of teaching. But approval from the higher echelons does not always mean easy cooperation with the lower-ranking men with whom the day-to-day routine work is carried on. From the other side the lesson which the social reformers learnt was that one has to fight to get help from official agencies. Their work lay in pointing out Government shortcomings, and in endeavouring to force the Government into doing what it did not want to do, or sometimes was ashamed not to have done. No Government likes those who make a habit of washing the administrators' dirty linen in public.

Encouragement of Cottage Industries

It follows that their experience as social reformers in no way conflicted with their later careers as Nationalist politicians. The techniques of protest were ready to hand and they were well-practised. Nor were they dependent on Government for assistance and patronage to such an extent that they could not break free and go into opposition. In this respect the relations of social workers and reformers with the Government differed very much in those days from what relations are at the present time.

In Orissa the ancestor of those who have charge of developing and encouraging cottage industries was Madhusudan Das, the founder of Utkal Sammilani. It is true that spinning was taught at the Satyabadi School even before it became a National school, but the work of encouraging weavers and other craftsmen, of finding markets for their products, of seeking improved techniques and better tools, was done by the Utkal Sammilani. In Cuttack Das ran a tannery and rescued the filigree silver craft from decay. The Conference undertook such work as printing and distributing a pamphlet on the cultivation of sugar-cane, training weavers to use the fly-shuttle, seeking ways to revive the salt industry, and so forth.

Later these and other activities became part of the Congress constructive work, but in the early days work of this kind did not lean towards 'mass' politics, as social reform work did. Madhusudan Das seems to have been the obverse of an agitator. He fought many battles with officials and with the Government: but he fought them with the skills of a lawyer and a diplomat, and with a rare doggedness and determination which won him the respect rather than the antipathy of officials. And in Das there was a streak of conservatism: he wrote, for instance, as essay on the nobility of sati.

Agrarian Reforms and Independence

There had been agrarian disorders in Orissa, from time to time, since the beginning of the 19th century. These were risings against individual Zemindars, or to protest against particular actions of the Government. But there was no coordinated protest against the system itself until the advent of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. In that year the first meeting of this organization was held in Orissa. During the next two years Peasant Councils (Kisan Sabha) were organized throughout the province. The Orissa Congress Socialist party was dissolved in 1938 because the Communists had captured it, but the work of organizing peasants to protest against the exactions of Zemindars and against the Zemindari system went on. The Congress Government, by then in office, passed various measures to improve the position of the tenants. Agitations against the landlords and Zemindars, no-rent and no-tax campaigns, continued, reaching their climax in the '42 Movement.

During the same period (from 1937-42) occurred the agitations in the Feudatory States, and they too were largely in the hands of the Socialist wing within Congress. This was an attempt to broaden the base of Congress support, and to involve the people of the countryside in the Independence Movement. The Salt campaigns and the Civil Disobedience Movements in the first years
of that decade had been a step in the same direction and had caught the popular imagination. In the towns the Movement had a popular backing, because the urban middle class understood and sympathized with the campaign for Independence. But in the countryside such an abstract concept could have little appeal. Even the salt campaign, although it exploited a grievance, really had little more than symbolic value. But a campaign which had as its target the local landlord and the local Zemindar, and which concentrated upon those privileges of the landlord which were most burdensome on his tenants, had a much more immediate appeal. ‘We noticed,’ I was told by one of the leaders in this campaign, ‘that our Kisan rallies were getting much bigger attendances than the ordinary Congress meetings. Then we knew we were on the right track.’ In short, the effect of these agrarian movements was to translate the aims of the Congress into something which could readily be understood by the peasants, and which would have their support, and at the same time to associate their grievances with the continuance of British rule in India.

Against Landlords and Zemindars

But the movement was directed, in the first instance, not against the British, but against the landlords and Zemindars. Most of these men were already loyal supporters of the British, and this attack upon their position and status in society intensified their dislike of the Congress and their loyalty towards the British. It is also clear that the Administration relied on the support of the landlords and helped them to make counter-propaganda against the Congress activities.

Yet the politicians themselves originated in this class. ‘Scratch a politician and you find a landlord,’ they say of themselves. On the whole they do not come from the bigger landlord families: but most of them were rich enough to live from their own resources throughout the long period of the Independence Movement. People below this economic category seldom had the education, and consequently the political awareness, to interest themselves either in reforming society or in winning Independence. The bigger landlords, on the other hand, were most of them opposed to the Independence Movement, and confined their political activities to Oriya Nationalism and, in the case of a few enlightened ones, to promoting education and social welfare outside the framework of the Utkal Sammllani.

Divisions and Cleavages

There was a division in the middle-class intelligentsia between those who gave themselves whole-heartedly to the Independence Movement, and those, like Madhusudan Das, who were primarily concerned with Oriya Nationalism. There were also cleavages within the Congress itself. There was a slight reflection of the general division in Congress between the moderates and the radicals, but the former were few in number, and most of those who were qualified by their personal eminence to play the role of the moderate and hold the confidence of the British, as happened in other parts of India, had remained outside the Congress. There were other cleavages, which seem to have been founded partly on caste and territorial differences, and partly upon cliques and power-intrigues of the kind that beset any political party.

But with the beginnings of the Congress Socialist Party arises a cleavage within the Congress which was based upon differences of ideology. The Congress Socialist Party was Marxist in outlook. Its members did not think of social reform in terms of a change of heart or of goodwill towards other men. Constructive work, as envisaged by the Congress, seemed to them to be no more than tinkering with the problems of society, although it might have a usefulness in establishing contact with the common people and helping to make them politically conscious. Social reform for them meant institutional reform, economic planning, and a socialist society. Their aims were clear-cut and easily defined.

Since 1947

Out of this conflict there have emerged, since Independence, two categories of persons who have broken away from the Congress party, or who remain somewhat uneasily within its ranks. The first are the left-wing parties, in Orissa the Praja Socialists and the Communists; the second are a category who in some cases have left politics altogether and have become social workers, typically in the Bhooonan Movement or in the different social work organizations; or, in other cases, those who have flirted with various traditionalist parties, such as the Jan Sangh, and who might join the new Swatantra Party if it looks like being a success; one, at least, joined the Ganatantra Parishad; and some have remained as Independents.

A similar gradation of outlook, from the extreme left at one side to those who are described by others as typical Gandhians’ on the other side, is to be found within the Congress itself.

Keeping to the Left

This conflict, between those who believe in a planned socialistic economy and those who do not, has continued to affect social reform since Independence. On the record of legislation, and on party manifestoes, socialists have the upper hand. Zemindari has been largely abolished. The battle against non-Zemindari landlords is about to begin with the passing of the ceiling-on-land measures and the drive to start co-operative farming. Not the Congress alone, but all parties in Orissa are committed to a socialist programme of reform, and they seem at the moment to be vying with one another to display socialistic content in their programmes. The Congress has introduced a bill setting the ceiling at 33 acres: the Ganatantra, the Praja Socialists and the Communists have set it at 15 acres: the Cuttack district Congress has gone one acre to the left and demanded a ceiling of 14 acres, for which they received a telegram of congratulation from the Orissa Communists.

But there is opposition to these ideas coming from several quarters. There are, as I have said, those who believe that measures of this kind are bound to be ineffective because they do not touch the moral problem and because they are at variance with traditional Indian ways of life. There are others taking the opposite view and saying that although such measures might satisfy the dictates of social justice, they ignore economic realities and in the end will decrease production and will merely result in the sharing out of greater and greater poverty. For them the first requirement is to increase production: distribution must logically
Opposition III-organised

This opposition is spasmodic, ill-organized, and usually voiced as private misgivings. There is no group as yet in Orissa which has put forward a programme openly opposed to socialism. The Gandhians go their own way, keeping mostly outside the arena of party politics. Those who place production first may function as a pressure group behind the scenes, and some of them may soon come into the open by putting their point of view before the Legislative Assembly, but they are not as yet an organized group openly opposed to the socialist policies advocated by Congress.

These are the main groups which separate from one another over social reform: the socialists who believe in a planned economy and whose first aim is social justice; those who may or may not believe in a planned economy, but who think that the first need is to raise production; and the Gandhians, who have their own economic ideas and who consider a moral reformation a more important need than and indeed a prior necessity to economic betterment.

Government Assistance

There are still many social workers and there are many more who style themselves in that way but do not merit the name. But the work they do, and their relations to Government and to the political parties is on the whole different from what it was before 1947.

In some cases the tradition of opposition to the ruling power goes on. The politician, particularly the small man in his own locality, who goes on hunger strike to draw attention to the Government’s scandalous neglect of the plight of agricultural labourers, or the distress of displaced persons, or even the need to have a new roof on the local school, will describe himself as a social worker. Sometimes more serious and responsible persons resort to the same tactics and run the risk of being labelled ‘agitators’, particularly if they are known to be sympathizers of a party in opposition, just as they were labelled by the British in the days before Independence. Again, when there is some crisis with which the official agencies cannot fully cope, as when there is a flood, then hosts of individual social workers come forward to help in the distribution of relief. Finally there are still a few individuals or small groups who go about exhorting and setting an example and pioneering, on a small scale, education or hygiene or some other form or socially beneficial work.

But by and large the day of the private person or small group of such persons is past. Firstly this has happened because the Government now accepts a much wider responsibility for social welfare than did its predecessor. If a man wants to start a school, or build a hospital, or dig a well, then sooner or later he goes to the Government or to one of the bigger social work societies to get money. The initiative still often comes from private subscriptions: but the organizers can usually count on Government assistance to keep their project running.

Reliance on Diplomacy

Consequently the attitude of such persons towards the Government much more resembles that of, in the old days, the Utkal Sammilani than it does that of the social reform groups which later merged with the Congress. Their tactic is diplomacy: they are prepared to argue their case, and to lobby, but they do not want to make themselves such an embarrassment that the Government will not help them. They are, so to speak, loyal subjects and their claims to assistance rests on this fact.

The Government reciprocates this attitude. They are committed to a welfare policy and they are prepared to help private organizations which carry on the work. There are official and semi-official bodies like the Khadi and Village Industries Board, the Social Welfare Board, or the Depressed Classes League, which exist to foster and encourage local self-help. Non-official groups, like the A B Sarva Seva Sangh are usually looked upon with favour, although in the case of this particular organization relations with the Orissa Government have not been particularly happy.

Nearer the People

The cynics have an explanation for this tendency on the part of Government. The philanthropist gets the grant which he needs: in return, the cynics say, he functions as a vote-getting agency for the party in power. But even if the cynics have correctly analysed the results of this relationship, this does not necessarily impugn the sincerity of either side. The gift which the Government makes may be done in an entirely disinterested fashion, because they think the work worth while; equally the social worker may rigorous abstain from making party propaganda. But the peasants’ horizon is limited and any outside agency tends to be considered a Government agency: and if its work is popular and successful, the credit goes to the party in power.

The point of the matter is that the social worker is one stage nearer to the people than is the politician. He usually works in a narrower orbit and he therefore has closer contacts with the common man. He is one way, but by far from being the only way, of getting in touch with and influencing the voters. Some of the politicians themselves go in for social work, leading teams of young men to build roads, or dig wells, or spending some of their time travelling about their constituencies exhorting and preaching. Their opponents dismiss this as a mere vote-catching device: but, even if they are quite sincere in what they are doing, it still remains true that successful social work brings a political bonus.

Mainly from the Middle Classes

A generalization about the character of the social worker will, just because it is a generalisation, inevitably do injustice to some of
The dress of the people...

Costumes, whether they are for occasions or for daily wear, vary all over the world. Climatic conditions, natural materials available, religious demands and individual ingenuity are some of the factors that determine the dress of a people.

Many varied costumes are worn in India, but different costumes need different qualities of cloth. The Mafatlal Group of Mills manufactures a wide range of cloth for everyday use in all parts of the country.

Women from different parts of the country wear the saree in their own special way. The Marathi Maharashtrian women of Western India, for instance, wear a nine-yard saree, like a dhoti, where the legs and tucked in at the back.

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Mafatlal's other interests include Textiles and Banking.

MAFATLAL HOUSE, BANDRA RECLAMATION, BOMBAY.
them. But it is worth making because it shows up both their value and their limitations as actors on the political scene.

Firstly such a man comes in most but not in all instances from that section of the middle class which has provided the professional people, and the politically conscious people. In Orissa the greater part of them come from the coastal districts, and even those who originate elsewhere are, so to speak, 'honorably' Katakis. There are today people of humbler origin who are styled social workers, but many of these are paid for what they do, and by force of circumstances are inevitably dedicated as much to their wage-packet as to their avocation. I have several times heard their wage-packet as to their avocation. I have several times heard these are paid for what they do, and by force of circumstances are inevitably dedicated as much to their wage-packet as to their avocation. I have several times heard

The Class Barrier

Secondly, because they come from the middle classes, these social workers cannot make the kind of contact they would like to make. They strain themselves to regard the peasants as their brothers; some live in conditions of extreme austerity and undergo considerable physical hardships; but class and upbringing make a barrier which it is all but impossible to cross. While they set out to regard the peasants as brothers, they end only in treating them as children. This is particularly true of their contacts in the tribal areas, and it is inevitable for they are not prepared to accept all peasant or tribal values. As with some missionaries and indeed they are a kind of missionary, they seek to impose middle-class values on people who cannot see the intrinsic worth of middle-class culture in a peasant or a tribal setting. Drink is an obvious example. There are also occasional outbursts of disgust about 'half-naked' tribal women.

Thirdly—and this is perhaps the most risky generalization of all—the sincere social worker, just because he is sincere, is a desperately serious person with very strong convictions. I do not mean that he or she never smiles. I am referring rather to an intensity of purpose, and an absence of that cheerful extrovert cynicism, which often helps to achieve the common touch. One suspects that in some cases personal emotional difficulties lie behind it, and that the missionary work is at the deepest level prompted not by a regard for the welfare of others (although this may be the conscious motive), but is a subconscious effort to solve their personal difficulties by reforming the lives of others. But this is no more than a superficial observation: and perhaps one should not make statements about subconscious minds on the basis of conversations and having observed a few social workers in action.

Not against Basic Institutions

Social reform, in its beginning in Orissa, was a generalized attack upon poverty and ignorance and an attempt to undermine not so much the basic institutions which were the causes of these two things, but rather their symbolic manifestations: not, for instance, an attack upon the landlord system itself, but upon the symbols by which one class of landlord, the Brahman, displayed their superiority. The ultimate source of this activity was, as in Bengal, the impact of European values and the European example: and the work was carried on mainly by the middle classes. It was rather an attack upon what were regarded as degrading customs, upon such cultural items as the wearing of beards or the payment of dowries, and not so much upon the social structure.

Those members of the upper class who were associated with the movement, and some members of the middle-classes like Madhusudan Das, who had made a particular success of life in a European profession, concentrated more on the positive side, upon education and economic betterment, and looked with indifference, or even disgust, upon the attempts to ridicule traditional Hindu values.

Change by Legislation

By the second decade of the present century the surplus energy which had gone into education and social reform was diverted to political work in the Congress: although, of course, 'constructive work' continued under Congress auspices. Other people, the upper classes and the Oriya nationalists, remained outside the Indian Nationalist movement, but continued their social work as before.

By the third decade of this century social reform had ceased to be only an attack upon customs and had become an attempt to change the structure of society by legislation, an attack upon Untouchability and a direct onset on a particular class, the landlords. Zemindars, and rulers of the Feudatory States.

This attempt to change society by legislation, the 'institutional reform' approach, still holds the centre of the stage. On the whole social workers no longer harass the Government, as they did in British days, but cooperate with it, and, indeed, are an important means of communication between the Government and the people.

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