The Weaker Sections

THE Constitution of India does not list the right to work among the Fundamental Rights, but one of the Directive Principles of State Policy enjoins upon the State, "within the limits of its economic capacity and development to make effective provision for securing the right to work". This does not bother anybody very much, nor has its meaning been fully grasped by many people judging from the angry comment of a knighted financial magnate that it is everyone's 'duty to work'. The worthy gentleman was genuinely puzzled by the 'right to work'. There are many like him and they are fundamentally right in a sense. No one who has pondered over the implications of guaranteeing the right to work to every able-bodied person, male or female, irrespective of religion, caste or creed, would agree to accept it as a fundamental right. Neither does the Constitution of India; it wisely limits this specious promise with adequate provisos and qualifications.

Now, no one may know for sure the state of unemployment in the country. But both the most enthusiastic supporters as well as the critics of the Plan know that the Planning Commission themselves view the prospects with grave concern and that in fact the Third Plan aims at nothing better than preventing the situation from getting any worse. Finding employment for those who will be entering the working-age group during the next five years is the maximum they are going to attempt: if the backlog of unemployed, which runs to millions does not increase, they would be content to call it a day.

A Study Group headed by Shri Jayaprakash Narayan constituted by the Government of India which was asked to look into the condition of the weaker sections of the rural community wants to upset the apple cart by asking the Government "to guarantee employment to every citizen who is prepared and fit to do manual labour". It wants the Government not only to undertake this responsibility but to make a declaration to that effect. Such a guarantee and declaration, the Team feels, would work "a psychological transformation and lift up the pall of despair and discouragement that overshadows millions of Indian homes. It might indeed prove to be a spark to kindle the energies of a somnolent giant".

There is too much apathy and too little faith in the promises of Government, ... especially in this period before the elections — for here, a label has to make do for analysis which it never does. The appropriate remedy obviously would be to radically change that structure instead of bolstering it up with all manner of supplementary measures. About the third factor mentioned, viz, imbalance between population and resources, logic demands that either population be checked or resources be augmented. To the extent that the latter aim is achieved, the rural works programme would be a move in the right direction, provided adequate number of productive projects can be worked out.

The right to work, by Constitutional guarantee or Government notification, may not bother anybody very much. But the problem of unemployment, no doubt, does.
About-Turn in the Congo

The Congo appears to have become the permanent playing field of international intrigue, the results of which reflect themselves in the bewildering changes to which the United Nations policies on the spot are subjected from time to time. One of the most violent of these changes is in evidence now, and consists of the “agreement” which the United Nations representatives in Katanga have concluded with “President” Tshombe. The whole range of circumstances surrounding the conclusion of this agreement is almost too preposterous for words. Indeed, the very presence of the United Nations in Katanga is the outcome of the fact that the United Nations mission which was to go to Katanga at the beginning of last month that there was no alternative but to subdue Mr Tshombe by force. That some such conclusion would ultimately be inescapable had been recognised many months earlier by the Security Council, when it passed its famous resolution empowering the United Nations mission to “use force if necessary” in the restoration of Congolese integrity. Accordingly, it was a welcome relief to note last month that the U.N. forces sent to control the situation which had arisen from the election of Mr Tshombe “as a gesture of good intentions” by the United Nations in Elizabethville, after the Adoula Government’s departure to re-unite the Katanga province with the rest of the country. It was in obedience to this arrangement that the U.N. forces marched into Katanga and, with much loss of life on both sides, took possession of many of the key-points in Elizabethville and sent Mr Tshombe fleeing into Rhodesia.

The first signs of weakness in U.N. policy appeared at this stage, when Britain and some other Western powers began loudly to question the right of the United Nations to depose “a constitutionally elected” head of State, meaning Mr Tshombe, and assist in the “invasion” of his country. Britain, in raising these objections, conveniently forgot that the “State” of Katanga was a self-proclaimed one, and that the constitution which had permitted the election of Mr Tshombe to lead the Katanga provincial government was immediately afterwards repudiated by him. Britain also forgot the more material point that the sole object of the United Nations’ operation in the Congo was to deal with the situation which had arisen from Mr Tshombe, under the active guidance and influence of the Belgians, breaking away from the rest of the country.

All this is clear; yet Britain’s diplomatic intervention at that stage served its purpose of confusing the situation beyond repair. Even Mr Hammarskjöld was persuaded to launch upon the peculiar exercise of seeking a “cease-fire” with Mr Tshombe—a fatal attempt in which he perished. Yet it occurred to no one to ask what business the United Nations had to arrange a cease-fire between itself and Katanga’s ousted President.

What followed is, if possible, even more preposterous. Some of the key-positions held by the United Nations in Elizabethville, after much fighting and sacrifice of life, were suddenly handed back to Mr Tshombe “as a gesture of good