

to become less, and less dependent on foreign aid, we are increasingly basing our future development on external assistance. In the first five-year plan period, foreign aid totalled six per cent of the total investment. In the second planning period, it was 13 per cent. And in the coming five years about 25 per cent or possibly more. With such perspectives, we can only be 'unhappy' about the indiscretions of an Ambassador whose brief is to get a sizeable portion of this aid.

However, despite all our efforts to please, we do not seem to be making much progress. First, the US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee disturbed our peace by voting a 25 per cent cut in aid to India, a cut that happily has been restored in large part. Now the six-nation 'Aid India Club; short of about 220 million dollars to match the US commitment of 500 million dollars, has adjourned without taking a decision on how much assistance to give in the second year of the Plan.

Not surprisingly, there is consternation in Delhi. Sterling bal-

ances are low, standing at around Rs 109 crores, and the export drive is unlikely to change the picture to any appreciable extent. This explains the fresh anxiety in certain policy-making quarters about what is euphemistically called 'the high cost of production in India.

But, doing the rounds in the Capital you would not notice the atmosphere of crisis and demoralisation, nor the cynicism which is now dominant in the psychology of the ruling party over which the Prime Minister presides in brooding silence. The knowledgeable are talking about President Radhakrishnan's: weekly durbars, Subramanian's energetic handling of the problem of the public sector, K D Malaviya's determination to transport coal by the Ganga, V K Krishna Menon's influence on the Prime Minister, and Gulzarilal Nanda's efforts to organise 'socialist action.'

In fact, it is significant that there has not been more comment on Nanda's 'socialist action'. The

feeling is general that the 'ginger group' in the Congress, Party is trying to stage a come-back through socialist action. Nanda's open espousal of this cause, considered 'lost' until only recently, goes to show that frustration within the still thinking elements of the ruling party is growing rapidly. If only the Prime Minister would oblige by taking a more active interest, the partisans argue. But he does not. He is content to react like a grandfather not quite able to understand what his grand-children are up to. And frustration keeps mounting.

Meanwhile, arrangements are under way for the first meeting of the National Integration Council during the coming week. It has taken a long time to call this meeting, and the indications are that the DMK's secessionist stand will come under fire. Political pundits, who have imbibed some wisdom in these years of Independence, are hoping that apart from denunciations, the integrators will take serious note of the policies causing North-South tension.

Letter from Calcutta

Operation of Railways

IT is all a matter of one's viewpoint. A sympathetic observer may see in the Congress Parliamentary Party's concern for the punctuality of passenger trains a reflection of its sensitivity to public opinion. Others less charitably inclined may wonder why the ruling party should pick on this to the exclusion of far more serious issues before the country.

The Chief Operating Superintendents of the Railways meeting here this week are dutifully giving their attention to improving punctuality. This particular problem, according to an official report of the briefing given to them by Shri Kripal Singh, Member. Transportation. Railway Board, stands at the head of the three-point agenda, the other two being the fulfilment of Railway's commitments to the steel and coal industries, and stepping up transport for exports — a somewhat Alice-like disorder in priorities but perhaps that is the way Shri Jagjivan Ram wants it for he is not

only the Railway Minister but also an overseer of the party machine.

Arrears in Replacement

Punctuality is only the end result of operational efficiency in several respects, and it is worth looking into the problem in some detail. In the 11 years ended 1960-61 the number of all trains arriving on time has improved by six per cent on the broad gauge, and 11 per cent on the metre gauge. What the Railways do not explain, however, is the sharp improvement between 1950-51 and 1952-53 followed by an equally severe setback from which recovery has been steady but exceedingly slow. Parliament's estimates committee went into this problem in 1955 and suggested a punctuality target of 90 per cent for all trains, 85 per cent for mail and important through trains, 95 per cent for electric suburban trains and 90 per cent for other passenger trains. Clearly, we are still quite some way from achieving these targets.

In their defence, the Railways might well point out that the percentage of over-age coaching stock and locomotives on the broad gauge was higher in 1960-61 than in 1950-51 — indicative of the arrears in the replacement programme. In this connection it is surprising that replacement on metre gauge has proceeded faster than on the broad gauge (which accounts for 57.2 per cent of passenger miles and 91.9 per cent of total ton miles). Could it be that over-aged stock was continued in service on broad gauge because requirements increased faster than the planners visualised? The Second Plan witnessed an increase in passenger traffic of 21 per cent on the broad gauge, and six per cent on metre gauge in passenger miles.

The Railways might also cite in this context the fact that track renewals are in arrears, resulting in the continuance of speed restrictions over thousands of miles, "due to the shortfall in the supply of rails from indigenous sources, neces-

sitating imports, which were however restrictive". During the Second Plan, 13,000 miles were "due for renewal and Rs 100 crores were earmarked to take care of 8,000 miles, leaving the balance for attention during the Third Plan. Actually, some 6,244 miles of track and 7,102 miles of sleepers were renewed, inflating the spill over.

The Railways have also to contend* with the pulling of alarm chains, although the extent of misuse was slightly lower in 1960-61 than in the previous year. A total of 48,875 cases were reported in 1960-61 against 53,334 a year before, and unauthorised use came down from 82 per cent to 80.7 per cent. As the Railway Board states: "no help was forthcoming from the passengers in compartments in pointing out offenders, requiring the posting of plain-clothes men in each compartment on the bad areas in the most vulnerable trains*".

Poor Quality of Coal

Added to these is the handicap of bad, high ash coal resulting in an increasing number of engine failures. Despite the investment on maintenance and repair facilities, the improvement in engine miles per day — an important index of utilisation — shows hardly any improvement over the years. In 1958-59, the figure of engine miles per day for passenger engines in use was 170 which went up only to 172 in 1960-61. In terms of all engines on line, the figure was only 84 on broad gauge in 1959-60 and 85 in 1960-61. The Kunzru Committee's modest target of 90 engine miles per day is yet unachieved.

The seemingly simple aim of punctuality cannot, therefore, be achieved by exhortations alone; a great deal of investment on equipment and facilities will be necessary before significant achievements can be expected. Whether punctuality of passenger trains should receive priority over other tasks that Railways have to contend with is a separate matter on which economists and politicians are unlikely to see eye to eye. Only last week, Shri K D Malaviya, Union Minister of Mines and Fuel, said here that he would favour cancellation of passenger trains to enable him to run coal specials*

Overcrowding Will Continue

Likewise, there is little chance that overcrowding on trains will be alleviated in the near future. The total number of passenger carriages on line has gone up from 15,148 (including both broad and metre gauge) in 1956-57 to only 18,148 or a little over 20 per cent against the 25 per cent increase in passenger traffic. The Railways have taken a census of occupation on all railways to determine the extent of overcrowding, according to which overcrowding has dropped from 16 per cent in 1955 to 13 per cent in 1960 on the broad gauge and from 30 per cent to 11 per cent on the metre gauge. Further improvements will depend on the number of coaches that can be placed in service by the manufacturers like the Perambur Coach factory, Hindustan Aircraft, Jessop & Co and the Railway workshops. These sources supplied 769 broad gauge and 513 metre gauge coaches last year.

On the other two problems set before the Operating Superintendents by Shri Kripal Singh, the Railway Board's ideas are well-known. A firm promise has been made that all steel plant traffic will be carried in full, but whether the pattern of movement will accord with the industry's requirements is another matter. There are continuing complaints that the arrival of raw materials is erratic leading to periodic "feasts and famines". Secondly, assorted wagons making up the train create difficulties in unloading and result in longer wagon detention. The Railways, on their part, claim that these shortcomings arise from present operating conditions to which the steel plants themselves contribute.

In this medley of accusation and counter-accusation, the truth is very difficult to ascertain. The Railways assert that if a little co-operation from the mining industry was forthcoming, they would meet the targets set for them in the Third Plan. What the Railways omit to say, however, is that their promises are strictly conditional upon "other" coal consumers being supplied from central dumps to which coal will move in box wagons. At a recent press conference persistent questions failed to elicit from the Coal Controller a clear-

cut answer on the progress of the dumps. It is known however, that both States and consumers have been dragging their feet and at present many dumps are only "notional". Secondly, they are counting upon outlying fields supplying West and South India, to keep despatches from West Bengal/Bihar pegged at present levels. In 1961-62, according to the annual report of the Ministry of Mines and Fuel, the daily average loading from the outlying fields rose by 12 wagons from 1,158 to 1,170. against an increase, of 317 in Bengal/Bihar. In other words, despatches from the outlying fields went up by about 35,000 tons in the first year of the Third Plan against the target of 17.43 million tons of additional production set for them. This year's rise of seven percent in despatches from Bengal/Bihar compares unfavourably with 10 per cent achieved last year; even so, almost 2.5 million tons more were moved.

Exports Hit

The Railways' performance in respect of export of ores has been the subject of frequent controversy, mine owners claiming that their working had often come to a halt because of the piling up of stocks awaiting movement. The involvement of STC in the triangular set up befogs the issues even more. The fact, however, remains that exports in the calendar year 1961 were marginally higher by 45,000 tons — from 3.37 million to 3.42 million tons. Total output showed, however, an improvement in 1961-62 of 1.84 million the increase being absorbed by the larger offtake of the steel plants.

The complaints of inadequate transport capacity came chiefly from the Bara Jamda area of the Keonjhar district of Orissa served by an electrified double-track branch line which is also meant to carry the ore traffic to Durgapur, Burnpur and Jamshedpur. In addition, the Railways have had to cope with unplanned movements of ore from this area to Rourkela because its own captive mine was unable to meet its full requirements. If, as a result exports traffic suffered it is not surprising. Again, the Railways alone are not to blame; actual shipments depend on handling capacity at the ports.



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