

# Weekly Notes

## Con Congress Question Prohibition ?

MYSORE'S Finance Minister told the State Assembly, according to a news agency report, that: "If the unanimous or even a majority opinion in the House was that prohibition was 'of no use', the Government would have to take note of it. A stage might come, when the Government would have to consider whether to 'keep or scrap' prohibition". The Minister further remarked that the Government was aware of the difficulties in the successful implementation of prohibition and that the legislature would be given an opportunity to discuss the matter before the Government considered any alteration in its prohibition policy. The Press correspondent who reported this, added that the Finance Minister's statement was particularly significant because the Chief Minister and other members of the ruling party were credited with a similar view.

It is not impossible that members of the Congress party in the other States and even the Congress Ministers who are responsible for enforcing Prohibition in their States, harbour such thoughts. But it was left to Mysore's Finance Minister to give public expression to them. Perhaps one should wait before making a final judgment, for what is reported in the papers can always be contradicted, and Ministers in State Governments hold office only during the pleasure of the High Command. Never has a responsible Congressman permitted himself to express the slightest doubt about prohibition, and it would be surprising indeed if the Congress were to reverse a policy merely because it cannot be implemented.

Not that Mysore has any special reasons to wake up earlier than the other States to the folly and futility of prohibition. Nor is there any reason to suppose that this particular State has been paying more heavily for prohibition than the others. For it could not have been anything more than a chance coincidence that the same paper, which carried this startling statement from Shri B D Jatti, also carried the following small news item: "At least

eight deaths due to 'drink poisoning' in the last few days have been reported from the Kolar goM mining area. Unconfirmed reports place the death-roll as high as 62". The following day's paper reported that the Uepuly Inspector General of Police in Bangalore told newsmen that reports that more than 60 had died, were definitely exaggerated. It was officially stated, however, that the number of deaths due to consumption of spurious drinks in the Kolar gold mining area during the past four days had mounted to 18.

If social cost in terms of administrative and political corruption and in terms of human degradation were to count, Bombay should have been the first to cry a halt, for it has the widest and longest experience to profit from. But its very enlightened Finance Minister, with a first-rate administrative record behind him, has chosen to keep mum. It was left to a politician Minister of Mysore to speak out and court opprobrium.

## Meaningless Referendum

HOW heretical and unorthodox the Mysore Ministers views are, how disturbing to his opposite numbers in the other States and what a bad boy he must be in the eyes of his mentors come out sharply when one looks to the conduct of the model Congressman who runs the Government in East Punjab. Shri P S Kairon, the Chief Minister, knows the correct, democratic practice and also knows what is the proper conduct for Congressmen. He has offered to put the issue of prohibition to the free vote of the people, but the subject of referendum is not whether prohibition is good or bad — even to ask such a question would be sacrilege — but whether complete prohibition should be introduced within the Third Plan and how should the programmes be phased. People cannot be trusted to judge whether prohibition is good or not. This is for their betters to decide and they have decided.

Truth to tell by and large, the vast majority of the people in any State are quite indifferent about prohibition. Drinking is confined to only a section of people the semi-westernised at one end, and the

millhands, and some of the lower classes at the other. In between, the vast bulk of the people have no particular opinion about prohibition and no hard feelings, for or against. But if an exception has to be made — one has to go by hunches in such things — perhaps it could be made in the case of Punjab, where drinking is perhaps much more widespread than in any other State. A referendum on prohibition could thus be meaningful, had it been applied to Punjab. In most other States one can almost take for granted what the outcome would be.

Not only eyebrows would be raised in top Congress circles at Jatti's apostasy. constitutional pundits will reel off chapter and verse to prove that it is a directive of the Constitution, to be carried out as and when possible, but it is not permissible to turn back having once started on it. That the Constitution has many other directives also and that all of them cannot be carried out at the same time or that the directives are not even mutually consistent even to raise such a question is to invite the derision of those who guide the destiny of the country today.

## The Sixteenth State

THE approval by Parliament of the Bills creating Nagaland as the sixteenth State of the Indian Union and for amending the Constitution for the purpose marks the culmination of the policy which the Government of India has been pursuing towards the Nagas since 1937. when it was decided to separate the Naga Hills district from Assam. Nagaland, which will be the smallest State in the country and will have an area of 6,000 sq miles and a population of five to six lakhs, will comprise three districts : Kohima, Mokokchung and Tuensang. It will be represented by one member each in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha and will have a Legislative Assembly with 46 elected members. The Legislative Assembly will replace the Interim Body created in 1960. The State, like any other State, will be administered by a Governor, who will also be Governor of Assam, advised by a Council of Ministers.

Certain special features have been written into the Bills creating Nagaland. These have been justified in view of the unusual conditions prevailing in Nagaland and the special position of the Tuensang district within the State because of its relative backwardness compared to the other two districts. For the time being, the Governor of the State will have special powers in regard to law and order and finance but these powers will be relinquished as soon as the President of India decides that the situation in the State has become normal. The other special provision relates to the district of Tuensang. Tuensang will have a separate regional council. No act of the Nagaland Assembly will apply to the Tuensang district unless the Governor, on the recommendation of the regional council, permits it.

Even as the Union Parliament was approving the Nagaland Bills, echoes of the old and disastrous policy of integrating the Nagas, forcibly if need be, which was followed immediately after Independence and to which the Prime Minister made regretful references in his speech in the Lok Sabha, were heard in far off Shillong, in Assam. There in the State Assembly the Chief Minister, Shri B P Chaliha, moved a resolution declaring that the provisions of the Nagaland Bills were not "conducive" to the objective of co-ordinated development and political stability in the eastern region. The resolution said :

"This Assembly is of the opinion that in the interest of national solidarity and also with a view to bringing about a co-ordinated development and greater political stability of the Eastern region of India there should be an integrated political and administrative set-up of various units within this area and that nothing should be done which may have an effect of weakening this unity.

"This Assembly further considers that in such an integrated set-up special arrangements could be made to meet the needs of different regions of the area,

"This Assembly is of the view that the provisions of the State of Nagaland Bill, 1962 are not conducive to the aforesaid objectives."

#### **Not a Return to Isolation**

THE resolution has been quoted at length to show that the altitude of mind which created the Naga

problem after Independence has not at all died down. Before Independence British policy towards the Nagas was based on two principles: non-interference with the Nagas' traditional ways and tribal affairs and isolation of the Nagas from the Indians living in the plains. The Assamis and the Bengalis were not permitted to mix with the Nagas, not even to trade. This policy succeeded in its limited objective which was to keep the Nagas quiet and out of trouble.

In the immediate post-Independence period, fired no doubt by the laudable motive of national integration, but also by other motives which were not so laudable, the Assam Government followed an active policy of trying to assimilate the Nagas into Assam. The results were disastrous. The Nagas rebelled to a man and by 1956-57 it could be said that there were few Nagas who were not hostile to the Indian Government. It took the Government a decade almost to realise the folly of this policy. Only late in 1957 was the Naga Hills district separated from Assam and all Naga areas consolidated into one territory directly under the Central Ministry of External Affairs. If the Government can today claim that the number of hostile Nagas has been reduced from 15,000 to less than 2,000, the credit must go, whatever the success of the protracted military operations in the area by the Indian army, to this reversal of policy. The agreement with the leaders of the Naga National Convention followed in two years under which the Government conceded the demand for a separate Naga State. The Interim Body and the Council were formed and the Nagas have enjoyed progressively greater autonomy during the last two years.

This is not a return to the British policy of non-interference and isolation. Let it be admitted that the long isolation of the Nagas has been responsible for the barriers that exist today between them and their neighbours in the plains and it must be the ultimate objective of the Government's Naga policy to gradually break down these barriers. However, experience has taught us that the pace cannot be forced. Indeed, it has been proved that assimilation, even gradual, is not the answer we are looking for

at all. Instead, association may be that answer. The formation of Nagaland as a separate State, equal in status to the other States of the Union, is a necessary preliminary to the association of the Nagas with the rest of the people of India,

#### **Protection, Not for Peasants**

THAT there should be differences, even within the Congress party, over such an important piece of legislation as the U P Land Holdings Tax Bill is not very surprising. After all, it would be too much to expect all legislators, even though they do belong to the party which has moved the Bill, to agree with the details of the Bill. There could be differences, and legitimate ones, over such matters as the rate of increase in tax proposed, the exemption limit, etc. What is, however, appalling is that the very principle of taxing the rural sector is being questioned. And not only by members of the opposition parties, who might after all be expected to fish in troubled waters, but by Congressmen who swear by the Plans.

In all conscience, what Shri C B Gupta, the U P Chief Minister, said after the three-day meeting of the State Congress Legislature party, called to discuss the Land Tax Bill, was unexceptionable. All he said was that the meeting had approved of the principle of raising the land tax. It would be surprising, to say the least, if there were not even this bare minimum of agreement within the party. But there wasn't. As many as 50 Congress members of the Legislature made haste to point out in a letter to the Chief Minister that there had not been in fact agreement even on the principle of the levy !

The Land Holdings Tax Bill proposes to levy an annual tax of 2 ½ per cent on the capital value of agricultural holdings in U P. To take account of differences in quality of land, the Bill lays down the procedure for valuing the holdings for the purpose of levying the tax. The value of a holding is to be calculated as a multiple of the land revenue payable on it, the multiplier depending on the quality of the land and varying between 12 and 50. The effect of the new tax would be to raise the revenue payable on holdings by 30 per cent at the lowest