

supervise their work. There are Sahitya Rachanalayaks for training authors and publishers in the production of better books for children. There is an Education Evaluation Unit at the Centre which has persuaded the States to open similar units. Correspondence courses will soon be started for untrained secondary school teachers, while the possibility of introducing a scheme of productive labour by students in colleges and schools is being investigated by a committee. The multi-purpose schools are to be "strengthened" and Central Schools have been opened which are to emerge as high quality schools. There is a "Crash Programme" for improving science teaching in the schools. In addition, there are, of course, the more well-known 'projects' like the National Discipline Scheme, the Physical Education Scheme, etc.

But the biggest of all is the National Council of Educational Research and Training set up in 1961 and now in its fourth year. The NCER undertakes training, research and extension through the National Institute of Education and the four Regional Colleges of Education established at Ajmer, Mysore, Bhopal and Bhubaneswar. The National Institute of Education itself can boast of no less than eight separate wings dealing with psychological foundation; curriculum: methods and text books; science education; basic education; audio-visual education; fundamental education; and educational administration. It also has under it the Central Institute of Education.

Now we can really sit back and view this grand array with satisfaction. Does it matter if few of the basic issues in education have been settled? if we have no national policy, no well defined objectives or a basic philosophy of education? if the States can go ahead with chaotic schemes without agreement even about the number of years of schooling? if the question of the medium of instruction is still undecided? or if the impact of all these years of educational planning on our rural economy remains indeterminate?

All these can wait, apparently. In the meanwhile, the National Institute of Education will undertake research on "motivation for higher education", "development norms", "problems of adolescence", among other subjects, and no doubt publish very learned reports. But without having decided on the general pattern of and priorities in education at all levels, is this not

tinkering with the superstructure?

The two crying needs of our schools are better teachers and facilities and better books. What one would like to know a little more about from the Education Ministry is what is being done to meet them and with what success precisely.

Raw Rubber Shortage

IT is not easy to understand official policy in regard to import of raw rubber unless attention is paid to the interest groups which actively try to influence it. Imports of natural rubber amounted to about 26,000 tonnes in 1963-64. In 1964-65 they were slashed to 13,000 tonnes. But in 1965-66, it is reported, the Government has decided to restore the cut and allow imports of about 25,000 tonnes. The major interests which are affected by imports of raw rubber are the Rubber Board, representing the rubber plantations, the manufacturers of rubber products and the sole manufacturer of synthetic rubber, the company called Synthetics and Chemicals.

Manufacturers of rubber products are naturally keen to secure the maximum imports so that they can be assured of enough raw material. The opposition of Synthetics and Chemicals to imports is also not difficult to understand. As against its installed capacity of 30,000 tonnes, the company's production in 1963 was less than 9,000 tonnes. Production increased last year but was still no higher than 50 per cent of capacity. And even with such below-capacity production the company has had to carry embarrassingly large stock. Rubber manufacturers fight shy of the company's products because, first, its prices are higher than those of natural rubber and, second, adjustments and alterations have often to be made in plant and equipment to use synthetic rubber in place of natural rubber.

It is the attitude of the Rubber Board, however, which has been difficult to understand. The Board has looked upon both imports of raw rubber as well as any increase in synthetic rubber production as in some way threatening the rubber plantations. At one of its meetings last year the Board passed a resolution calling on the Government to stop the present system of granting licences for import of raw rubber direct to manufacturers and instead to channel all imports through the Board which would allocate supplies to consumers and also suggest to the Government the quantum of imports necessary. At the

same meeting, the Board also passed another resolution opposing the issue of licences for new synthetic rubber plants or for expansion of the existing plant on the ground that production of natural rubber would be adversely affected and the Board's efforts to develop the plantation industry would be "defeated".

To anyone who knows the facts about the supply of and demand for raw rubber the Rubber Board's fears will appear rather comical. From as far back as 1961 at least Indian natural rubber has never been able to meet the country's demand and the gap between supply and demand has steadily widened, necessitating ever-larger imports. The dependence on imports is likely to grow further in future. By the end of the Fourth Plan, according to official estimates, demand for rubber will be about 2.25 lakh tonnes whereas production of natural rubber is unlikely to exceed 72,000 tonnes. Unless production of synthetic rubber is stepped up, the balance will have to be met through imports.

Unfortunately, the performance of the country's sole synthetic rubber producer has been hardly satisfactory so far. Even in the best year, the company has had to operate at half-capacity — and that with the assistance of the Government's policy of allotting specified quantities of synthetic rubber to the various manufacturers and of linking offtake of synthetic rubber by them with the processing of their import applications for raw materials and spare parts. These props will obviously have to be continued until steps have been taken to bring down the high costs of production.

It is known that the Government has completed preliminary assessment of the prospects of setting up a second synthetic rubber plant. Final decision on the project is expected to be taken after the details of the petrochemical complex are finalised. In view of the difficulties of Synthetics and Chemicals, much interest will naturally centre on the estimates of costs of production of the second plant.

Murky Light on Defence

THE five-year plan for defence drawn up in 1963 will cost Rs 5,000 crores, including normal maintenance. It aims mainly at an army strength of 825,000 and 45 air force squadrons. The Defence Ministry's annual report for 1964-65 gives, for the first time, some outlines of the plan, and the programme of improved training and production of standard