

East. Hence France's demand to devise ways and means for avoiding a second Korea in Europe, Germany like Korea is divided in two and the parallel is too close to be ignored.

True, London and Washington are also, desirous of making an attempt at a negotiated settlement with Russia on the German problem. But both London and Washington are cynical of the prospects of a four-Power conference on Germany. Paris is too familiar with Russian diplomacy and the strategy of the "cold war" not to realise that Moscow may have, ulterior motives in Peking negotiations for a solution of the German problem, including de-militarization. But, Paris aptly emphasizes that nothing can be lost in making an honest effort to test Russia's sincerity. With disarming candour, M. Schuman admits that, though France is not in favour of appeasement, she would prefer a negotiated settlement as demanded by the realities of the situation.

Increasingly it becomes obvious that the Washington Conference has solved none of the world's problems. Also apparent is the sharp "difference in emphasis" in the approach of Britain and of America towards Far Eastern problems. Plans for a "cease-fire" or for stabilisation of the military situation in Korea have become obsolete and out-dated. It is probably apparent what Red China wants. She insists on having a voice in the ultimate solution of the Korean problem. She demands that the United States must accept her abiding political and strategic interest in Formosa by discontinuing aid to the Chiang clique. Above all, she expects to be admitted to the United Nations as the legitimate successor to the discredited Kuomintang regime and as the real representative of the new China.

These are demands which London is inclined to endorse. Washington remains adamant. Problems which could not be settled in Washington may yet be, solved by the proposed four-Power Conference. There is an over-riding ease for extending the scope of the four-Power Conference to include issues beyond Germany. Austria, Korea, Formosa, a peace treaty with Japan and Indo-China are some of the world issues in dispute which could be, and should be, included in the agenda of the Conference. This is what probably M. Schuman has in

mind in his passionate appeal to London and Washington, for a determined effort towards an amicable

settlement of the world's outstanding problems through mediation.

## Explorations in Food

**E**XCEPT those who formulate the Government policy on the subject, no one in his senses can believe that the country can be made self-sufficient in foodgrains by March 1951 or 1952, or any other date. Not that the Government of India themselves believe it, but of that more later. We were net importers of foodgrains before the war. After partition, we lost some important food-growing areas and to these if the increase in population during the intervening years is added, it would not need much statistical knowledge to realise that deficiency is a hard fact and a fact of considerable magnitude. What may be expected on commonsense grounds is confirmed by the statistics of the area under food cultivation and the average annual yield. This area has expanded in recent years, but simultaneously, there has been a decline in the average yield per acre.

The maladjustment between the demand and the supply of food has been growing. Whether it is being checked to any appreciable extent by the grow-more-food campaign is very much in dispute. Not only has the population increased but its composition has changed in a direction which tends to raise the aggregate demand for food, e.g., the relative increase of the lower age groups, falling proportion of women in the total population. The secular increase in the average national income also works in the same direction.

On the other hand food production has been continuously falling since and during World War II; the average productivity of all food lands taken together has fallen since the war, despite a progress in the extensive and perhaps also in the intensive cultivation of food crops during the last few years. The decline in productivity is due to economic and social causes which cannot be offset by *ad hoc* measures or by bringing new land under cultivation.

While, therefore, everything should be done to improve the long-

term outlook by working for changes which may not bear fruit overnight, the immediate problem can only be solved by maintaining imports and by controlling the distribution of the available foodgrains supply in a manner which will secure as even a share as possible to all.

The Government can justly claim that east of Suez, they alone have instituted and operated with a reasonable measure of efficiency a system of food control unequalled elsewhere. If we are facing a crisis, the best way to meet it is not to scrap this system which has been built up with so much cost and sacrifice but to improve it and make it more efficient. The obvious forward step there would be the introduction of monopoly procurement and extension of rationing to as wide an area as is administratively feasible. This step, desirable in any case, has been made imperative by the calamities of nature which have destroyed crops and reduced the stock to be distributed.

And once the need for imports is re-emphasised and accepted, it should call for co-ordinated efforts to ensure supplies by tapping new sources and exploring as far afield as is possible.

There is a call for political action of the right sort, the first for creating sanctions in favour of controls, and closer understanding with the State Governments to secure greater uniformity in the operation of food control. More specifically, it calls for the introduction of monopoly procurement and extension of rationing.

Arrangements for imports equally call for political action of the right sort in the international field.

What do we find instead? The basic idea of control has been sought to be sabotaged on more than one occasion with disastrous results. Even this week a sub-committee of eight of the Food Ministers assembled in Bombay debated the abolition of rationing in the rural areas, not the extension of such rationing. It was only after much wrangling and disputation that they accepted,

*albeit* reluctantly, that any theoretical consideration of control or decontrol was out of question in the context of the present situation."

Good that they were at least convinced in theory that control in foodgrains must continue. But what about making it more effective? Did the Food Ministers agree about monopoly procurement or even on greater uniformity in enforcing controls? Nothing of the sort. "Each State," it was decided, "in consultation with the Centre should maintain the arrangements which best serve the purpose of meeting the situation in the State in the coming year." Or in other words, surplus States will be free to complain that they are unable to procure more and deficit States will be equally free to complain that they are not getting enough to meet their rationing commitments!

That rural rationing should come under fire at the Food Ministers' Conference, that the Government of India should themselves sponsor the proposal that rural rationing should be abolished, has a sinister significance which cannot be missed or overlooked. Why this move for scrapping rationing, he it only in the rural areas, when everything points to the utmost necessity of conserving all available stocks, and to make them go the longest way, so that food may be shared equitably, irrespective of the contribution made by the provinces to its production? Naturally, as expected, it was the surplus States which favoured the idea, and the deficit States opposed it. The attitude of the State Governments in this matter is understandable. That of the Central Government is not, except on the view, unworthy of a Government which holds itself responsible for the welfare of the people, and professes to speak for all-India, that the Centre has been trying to avoid its responsibilities.

This is not to say that the position of the Centre is enviable at all. That it is not. It is saddled with the responsibility for feeding the people, but so feeble, weak and half-hearted has it been in discharging its responsibilities, that to this day, after tinkering with the problem for so many years, it leaves it sety" completely at the mercy of the State Governments. What it gets from the surplus States through procurement, it has to supplement with imports in order to discharge: its obli-

gations to the deficit States.

When the Government of India refer to shortage, they do not have in mind what is necessary to give everyone in India a square meal. The deficit or shortage in foodgrains has a very much more restricted and more specific connotation. It only means the amount of foodgrains the Centre needs, in addition to what it expects to get from the States by way of procurement, --3.7 million tons is the target for next year—to meet its commitments. The argument has to be stretched only a step further to demonstrate that the food problem can be solved once for all, and self-sufficiency attained in this sense simply by scrapping rationing altogether and by the Centre renouncing its responsibilities. MY. Munshi himself admitted that the system of rationing in the rural areas of Bombay which had hitherto been running smoothly enough, had very nearly broken down because the State Government had not been able to obtain the necessary stocks and the Centre had not been making up the deficiency.

The disintegration of a system which had been built up over long years through trial and error, and at the cost of much hardship imposed on the people, can be traced to the decontrol psychology assiduously fostered at the Centre. The evil thought is the father of the evil deed. The slackening of the efforts to obtain imports went hand in hand with the slow undermining of food control under the deceptive guise of pursuit of self-sufficiency.

The slackening of effort for importation which had never been energetic at best or marked overmuch by display of initiative or imagination is the counterpart of the rot which has been slowly creeping in inside the Government. Belatedly the Government have redefined the aim of self-sufficiency by admitting a number of reservations. Food imports have to be stopped by March 1952, except for what might be required—(a) to build up reserves; (b) to make good the loss in food production arising from diversion of food lands to the cultivation of other crops considered necessary in national interest; and (c) to meet the deficiency arising from natural calamities. If the latter also include failure of rain or excess or rainfall, occurrences which are common enough, the formula becomes foolproof. Can casuistry go any further?

From the above no room for doubt is left that the Government themselves have been aware all this time that they could not do without imports, even though they kept on shouting about self-sufficiency either to keep up morale or seek a safe, escape from their responsibilities. Would it not be more sensible and honest to renew efforts to explore all available sources for imports, and to try to obtain the latter on more advantageous terms? This also calls for political action of the 'right sort in the international sphere. The Bengal Famine, it must not be forgotten, was as much an offshoot of the Allied international strategy as it was a case of administrative failure. The need for closer collaboration with the countries which are surplus in rice is a matter of immediate urgency. The deterioration of the political situation may create difficulties in getting adequate shipping, but should not stand in the way of our negotiating for rice, the shortage of which forms the hard core of our food problem. The Food Minister fears that surplus provinces may not be able to procure any rice at all next year. And yet he can think of no better way of meeting the problem than appealing to the North-Indians to reduce their consumption of rice!

Asia's rice bowl is not empty. If we fail to obtain adequate stocks from Burma and Siam, if we make no attempt to tap the resources of Indonesia which alone, with an exportable surplus of more than a million tons of rice, can solve all our problems, it can only be because our External Affairs Ministry has not been briefed properly or because it does not know its job. Our failure abroad to tap the proper sources and get advantageous terms, then, will be paralleled by the failure at home to get the States to work together.

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