In New Clothes

THE immediate impact of the two volumes running into some thousand pages, massive, heavy and cyclostyled in a hurry, is, to say the least, stunning. The physical impact could have been made lighter and the 900 pages of cyclostyled matter, smudgy., difficult to read and exasperating because of blank pages and pages stitched upside down, could have been replaced by a printed volume of manageable proportions if Delhi had such modern conveniences as a reasonably equipped press with half a dozen lino machines and an equal number of efficient lino operators. Printing should not have taken more time. The result would have been more pleasing to the eye though easier reading does not necessarily make for easier understanding. Whether 300 pages of good print arc easier to digest than clumsily typed pages three times as bulky depends on the subject matter and on the manner in which it is handled.

The report has emerged from the chrysallis stage of the Draft Outline and goes on to explore wider horizons in an attempt to relate the Plan to the entire economy. Not that it succeeds fully in this attempt. There is much groping but also reaching out in highly sophisticated phraseology which gives the impression of plumbing depths which the Draft Outline had not attempted at all. The starting point of the wider exploration is the Appendix on National Budgeting which tries to present the plan in the social accounting framework in the approved style of the Swedish economists. An attempt has been made to estimate the volume of investment and to set the targets for development expenditure against social savings. Nay, more, the annual increase in national income is broadly followed and the estimated investment set off against the flow of incomes so that one gets something like a picture of the development as the Commission view it. The precision given to this picture,, however, is a little deceptive as; statistical data that are available do not suffice to draw more than the faintest outline of the perimeters. Some light is thrown, however dimly, on what happens in the public sector. A mass of relevant data has been brought together to throw light also on that part of the *private* sector which is covered by the organised industries. The rest of the scene remains obscure, veiled in mist. The Planning Commission have resisted the temptation of trying to rend this veil and peering into the mist by using the provisional findings of the rural credit survey or by hazarding an estimate, on their own, of savings.

Another refreshing change is in the presentation of targets. At the end of five years something better is promised than restoration of the pre-war standard of consumption for the people. Doubling of the national income in 27 years may not be a promise that will arouse wild enthusiasm but it is certainly better than being told that we have to run as fast as we can so that we may get back where we were years ago. The prospect of 11 per cent increase in the national income, though the bulk of it would have been eaten up by 1¼ per cent increase in population per annum, will still mean a net improvement in real consumption. Though the pre-war standard is not mentioned this time, perhaps an exercise in arithmetic might show that the change is more of words than of substance. Still it is a welcome change. If only because of the wide vistas it opens up of a higher rate of investment after the first five years and faster rate of development to which is postponed, among other things, the rectification of regional unbalance.

Finally it *is* planning without tears. This is ensured by keeping the rate of investment well within the limits of the annual increases in the national income Only a part- slightly less than a quarter in the first five years and half of it later on—is directed to investment; the rest goes to raise the per capita real income with the result that unless prices play a dirty trick meanwhile, per capita consumption will factually go up from, an estimated Rs 239 in 1950-51 to Rs 247 at the end of the five-year Plan.

Some gaps have been filled, others widened. To the first category belongs the enunciation of a policy of the demarcation of the respective spheres of cottage and small scale industries on the one hand and factory industry on the other. Another is the section on administration and the administration of State enterprises. The gap that is widened is that of finance The Plan does not concern itself primarily or directly with the assessment and allocation of physical resources. While the Draft Outline has been apologetic about Rs 290 crores deficit that had been left to be covered by the release of sterling during the period of the Plan, the final Plan is not drawn up in two detachable parts, the second of which is only to be taken if foreign assistance is forthcoming. indeed the Commission have grown bolder and have stepped up the target of development expenditure and intend to stick to it, rain or shine. True enough, they do not see how the gap could be bridged but they are determined that it is to be bridged. If foreign assistance comes, well and good. If it does not, the programme will not be clipped; only, marginal adjustments may be allowed. But neither is the deficit to exceed the sterling releases. The balance will have to he found from further taxation or loans, though as this part of the expenditure will have to he taken up at a later stage of the Plan, the Commission are content to leave it at that.

From this rarefied atmosphere the drop is sudden as one goes along. It is difficult to pick one's way through the mass of facts opinions, guesses and guesstimates, littered with all sorts of irrelevant matter that have little to do with defining the' objectives of Planning and setting out the priorities for achieving' them. Since one cannot cover eyerything under the sun, why not-draw a line somewhere and stick to it manfully? As planning is a continuous process, it is not humanly possible to foresee everything that is going to happen in the next five years. What is the point in chasing flies all along the way and providing, say, Rs 15 crores for assistance to scarcity affected areas since such contingencies can neither be foreseen nor provided for in advance. Surely the Planning Commission cannot go on scattering largesse and providing for all and sundry, usurping in the process the normal functions of the Government. It is in deciding about the objectives that the report encounters really heavy weather. There are so many of them each demanding priority that their rival claims cannot be reconciled. Indeed one; should have thought that the neces-"

sary preparation For planning is to be modest and to realise that everything cannot be done all at the same time. Planning is *not* simultancous advance on all fronts, Since priority means that one is necessarily to take precedence over the other, the Planning Commission would not have lost lace had they done some plain speaking at the outset. Instead of doing that, they have wobbled and compromised and *gone* on repeating the nostrum which is really unmeaning that they are going to increase, the volume of employment, raise the standard of living, reduce inequalities and so on and so forth, instead of standing steadfast to the one statement that the central objective of planning was to raise the standard of living of the people and to open out to them opportunities for a richer and more varied life, by utilising more effectively the available resources, human and material. The conflicting objectives all jumbled together *do* not make for clearer understanding nor *do* they help to win wider popular support.

The attempt to reach out into wider horizons which is such a refreshing departure from the Draft Outline is not confined to explorations in social accounting. Though very feebly the Plan extends scope so as to draw in voluntary labour, e,g, by providing Rs 15 crores for local works and another Rs 4 crores for social welfare organisation on a voluntary basis. These forays into the people's sector, however, do not bridge the gap but are only tentative attempts at establishing points of contact. In the same category one would have to put the increase in the provision for cottage and small scale industries from Rs 5 to Rs 15 crores but for some major changes in industrial policy.

We have already mentioned that in defining the objectives the report had heavy sailing. It gets into a much worse predicament when it has to incorporate within the social accounting framework so neatly built up, the whims, fancies and pet theories of Wardha school of thought. The social accounting frame work is just a frame-work. Within it, Maganwadi is now formally installed, if not firmly entrenched. That is why precise formulation of the rate and pitasing of development expenditure gets mixed up with lihoomidan and preferential treatment to agricultural labourers for gifts of land. The labour co-operatives suggested in this connection hardly succeed in hiding the discomfiture of those who had to draft the report in accommodating such misfits. Worse still is the demarcation of the respective fields of operation for mills and handlooms, which is a crack in the neat theoretical structure of the Plan revealing such ugly features in the common production programme as the non-extension of the capacity of large-scale industry, extension of the reservation for the handlooms, and so on and so forth. This the plan-' nets have not tried to reconcile with their professed objectives stated with such unction that the essence of planning was the simultaneous advance on all fronts or that its aim was utilising more effectively the available resources, human and material.

Indeed as one goes half way through the bulky volumes, one begins to wonder about the true character of the Plan, whether it is native in origin and dressed up in deceptive western garth or whether it is still Marrow and Cambridge in achkan and churidar pyjamas. The doubt cannot be resolved by a study of the report alone. Its identity will only be revealed when the Plan gets going, and changes into working clothes.

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