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## Burnpur

IN the mineral belt that cuts across the borders of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa which is the hub of India's heavy industry—coal, minerals, steel and copper—the one name that is to be conjured with is neither that of Mahatma Gandhi nor that of Jamshedjee Tata nor even Rajen Mookherjee but that of a very different kind of man, the late Abdul Bari, one of nature's born labour leaders, a character thrown up by industrialisation and in some ways in advance of his times. Unless the spell that is still exercised by his name is grasped, one would no more be able to follow the labour dispute in Burnpur, than one could hope to understand Congress politics without knowing the part played by Mahatma Gandhi in the national movement. This is indeed a tall claim to make. Hut factory workers anywhere between Kulti and Tata-nagar would be surprised, if one doubted it, No labour leader in that industrial belt can obtain a listening unless he swears by Bari. Hence, whatever he the dispute, and whichever the policy, whoever contests for power and leadership will have to be or profess to be Bari's follower. It is no accidental coincidence, therefore, that both Shri Michael John, the labour leader of Burnpur and Tata Workers' Union and Shri C N Vyas, the lender of rival Action Committee, are Bari's lieutenants.

The contest is virtually for the succession to the gadi left vacant by Ban's unfortunate assassination in March 1947. But it is not a contest between two wings of the labour organisation, the Asansol Iron and Steel Workers Union, which the late Abdul Hari had founded and through which he had laid the relations between workers and employers on the firm foundation of the Bari Award, won at the end of 1946, after a three months' strike. Other elements and factors have entered into the situation. And though non-implementation of some of the provisions of the Bari Award has been put up now and again as one of the causes of action or matters of dispute, it is not the essence of the matter. For the subsequent developments in the labour situation at Burnpur one has to look elsewhere. The succession of Shri Michael John is undisputed at Jamshedpur where 31,000 members of his association owe him allegiance. Michael John has not only been able to wrest from the Tatas advantageous terms for the workers, the management itself has found in him a stabilising influence which has enabled industrial peace to be restored and maintained uninterrupted after an early spell of stormy labour troubles. Why have Michael John and his Union fared so differently at Burnpur? To this there is no simple answer. The strength of John's following is itself in dispute. The version that is usually attributed to the management and supported by official Congress is that his following continues to be large and overwhelming. A minority of trouble makers are holding the management to ransom by the well-known tactics of intimidation and gangsterism. The Action Committee is blamed for creating the present unhappy situation. If that is so, lockout should serve to restore conditions where saner counsel may have a chance to prevail and a settlement can be arrived at in due course. Indeed if the Government is consistent in following the lead given by Pandit Nehru in Parliament in spirit as well as in letter, and there is no back stepping, an early termination of the present deadlock can be expected with reasonable certainty.

It is difficult, however, for outsiders to get at the truth. And in any case, where the strength of the following of a labour leader or of