

Weekly Notes

Cotton Prospects

IT never rains but pours—or so it seems in respect of our raw cotton supplies. Time was when there was not enough cotton to go round, and we were compelled to plug the 'leakage' through exports of the raw material. But now, unless we step up our export quotas every other month, we shall find too much stocks on hand when the new crop starts coming into the market. That would not be a headache if the new crop threatened to be smaller than in the past year. But expectations are that it will be, if anything, 2 to 5 lakh bales more than in 1954-55. This is, in a sense, disturbing since last year's crop was itself a heavy one—of the order of 50 lakh bales. With large carry-over stocks, and the inevitable imports of long-staple varieties, we shall have in the coming year either to produce and consume more cloth, or export more cotton and textiles, or support raw cotton prices at the 'floor' through Government off-takes.

As if this was not enough, we have agreed to take about 85,000 bales of American cotton under the 'aid' programme. When exactly these will be on the Indian market is not clear; but it may be sooner than is generally expected, since the USA would only be too glad to get rid of some of her surplus cotton at the earliest possible moment. Even if the arrival of these stocks does not depress domestic prices, Government will in all probability have to subsidize the 'aid' cotton to attract buyers, and stop comparable varieties of East African cotton from coming into India. Reportedly, Indian Mills have already bought up their normal requirements, and Government may have to wait before the 'aid' cotton is absorbed in sizeable quantities, even at subsidized prices.

It is curious that a commodity which is in plentiful supply should have been chosen for import under the 'aid' programme. Raw cotton has to be sold, for the Government to benefit from the aid. And if sales have to be held over and subsidized, the counterpart funds will be much less than the American value of the imported bales. What really made the Government take on this unprofitable line? Either the Government was not aware of

the domestic supply position, or they were forced to accept cotton in a package deal. Whatever the reason, it is not a particularly sagacious move. If in order to dispose of the 'aid' cotton, we are forced to reduce imports from East African countries, we shall probably be doing harm to them immediately and to ourselves in the long-run. A little less of exports would impinge more heavily on the African exporters than on the USA. And India would, in the process, take on the aspect of an unreliable customer; so that later, when we have to fall back on East African supplies, we may not get the special terms which a steady buyer would.

Turkey and Greece

THE recent anti-Greek disturbances in Turkey touched off by the dynamite outrage in the Turkish Consulate in Salonika are strikingly reminiscent of the Armenian atrocities so distressingly familiar to students of Turkish history. Turkey has yet to live down these atrocities, a fact to which even outside observers like Lord Kinross have referred to not so long ago. Whatever the initial provocation, it can hardly justify the orgiastic display of mob violence under the very nose of the Turkish authorities, who have displayed a strange pusillanimity in the face of civil commotion. Surely a state professedly in the camp of the Western democracies can insist on better standards of conduct on the part of its citizens towards minorities. The Middle East is a hotbed of mob politics and Governments seem to be swayed by the collective frenzy emanating from the bazaar quarters, whether it be the Suq of Istanbul, the Bulak of Cairo, or the riverine slums of Baghdad. The Turkish brand of mass recidivism seems to have been actuated as much by political considerations as by economic rivalry. The Greek in Turkey—in fact anywhere outside his native Greece is an eminently successful businessman and commercial success of a minority group is hardly likely to endear it to the majority which at least in the Middle East is not particularly known for its business acumen. This is what makes the Greek, the Copt, the Armenian and the Jew a tempting target for mobs in the Middle East. Greece has shown admirable restraint and dignity in the face of grave provocation.

In the meanwhile, the present discord between two states linked by mutual defence arrangements will raise many anxious eye-brows in the Pentagon and NATO headquarters and perhaps more than a snigger across the Black Sea.

Bowing to Logic

THE dissolution of the Fourth Party, successor to the old Muslim League in Bombay State, marks a new trend in Muslim thought, which, under high-pressure communal propaganda, had tended to be largely sectarian, exclusive and obstructionist for more than four decades. League leaders in Bombay were mainly responsible for giving a vicious and even violent twist to Muslim opinion; and it is therefore in the fitness of things that the new orientation should . . . originate from here. And what Bombay decides today, the rest of the country is apt to accept tomorrow, the more so as in the case of Muslims at least, this City represents not only economic and intellectual primacy, but also political leadership. It was some nine years ago at Kesar Baug Hall that Jinnah got his followers to vote for "indirect action" which led to much disturbance and suffering in the country and in a way paved the way for Pakistan; and now in that very hall, a significant new decision has been taken which may influence the destinies of Muslims for decades to come.

The choice before ex-Leaguers has been fairly clear ever since the advent of Independence, though the long period of isolation and contrariness earlier, initiated and encouraged by themselves, might have made it a little difficult for them to switch over to a new line of thought in a hurry. The little window-dressing that was attempted in Bombay by converting the old Muslim League into the Fourth Party, with supposedly a non-communal approach, did not achieve any good. In the changed circumstances in the country, with secularism accepted both in principle and practice, the ex-Leaguers could not any longer appeal to the narrow communal instincts of their followers and even if they tried to do so, there was little to gain. At the same time, because of the old heritage of the League, the Fourth Party could not win much sympathy from the wider non-communal public or from parties run largely on economic and political lines.