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## Contents

<b>EDITORIALS</b>			
Who Does the Planning?	687	Economic Growth and Sectoral Balance	
Favourable International Setting	689	Amlan Datta	711
Pre-planning the Elections	691	The Choice of Technique	
<b>OFF THE RECORD</b>		Joan Robinson	715
Life Force Overwhelms	693	Salient Features of the Plan	710
<b>A CALCUTTA DIARY</b>		Labour Policy and Programmes in the Plan	
The Pathology of a Myth	774	From H Labour Correspondent	723
<b>OUR DELHI LETTER</b>		Grouse Against the Plan	
The Travail of Planning	783	-From a Correspondent in the South	725
<b>FROM THE LONDON END</b>		Development of Design and Technique in Handicrafts	
Tremors and Earthquakes	695	Prabha. Shah	727
<b>OFFICIAL PAPERS</b>		Men for the Second Plan	
Working of Community Projects and N E S		A C Chhatrapati	731
Evelyn Wood	753	How Not to Run State Undertakings	
<b>SPECIAL ARTICLES</b>		R P Iyer	733
The Indian and Chinese Plans		Consumer Goods and Disposable Income	
-K N Raj	699	A Rudra	735
Non-Monetized Economy and Development		Agriculture in the Plan	
Sukhamoy Chakravarty	703	Contributed	740
Capital Output Ratio Its Uses and Abuses		Land Reform Proposals in the Second Five Year Plan	
-Arun Ghosh	707	M L Dantwala	713
		Agricultural Targets in the Second Plan	
		P Ramanand Rao	747
		Agricultural Output in the First Plan	
		Wilfred Malenbaum	751
		Organisation and Management of Public Enterprises: Bangalore Symposium	
		Y S Pandit	757
		The Agricultural Labour Enquiry Reflections on Concepts and Methods	
		-Daniel Thorner	759
		A Policy for Cotton Textiles	
		R K Hazari	767
		Credit Expansion During the Current Busy Season	
		S N Sen	775
		Industry in the Plan	
		George Rosen	779
		The Coal Sector of the Plan	
		K M Purkayastha	781
		<b>AROUND THE MARKETS</b>	
		Industry, Investors and the Plan	770

## Who Does the Planning?

MORE than a year has passed since the draft of the Draft Plan-frame was presented to the public. Examination of this draft by economists and technicians at the expert level and by administrators and political groups, it was thought, would be carried on intensively for the next few months so that ideas could crystallise and take shape. After exhaustive study and discussion, the final Plan that would emerge, it was assumed, would incorporate the results and supply the missing links, if any, and strengthen the weaker ones in the Plan-frame. It was also taken for granted that the Planning Commission would satisfy itself about the internal consistencies and make the final plan shape.

during the year that has passed,

controversy has been focussed on various points from time to time, the limit of deficit financing, the role of village industries, and the management of economic undertakings in the public sector. Partly associated with this last, but also independently of it, controversy has raged on another point viz. the financial procedure best suited for the tasks that the Government have undertaken. Finally, there was uncertainty about the capacity of the Railways to move the goods.

On the first of these, viz., deficit financing, the Planning Commission appears to have taken a firm stand, in that of the range of deficit proposed in the Draft Plan-frame of Rs 1,000 to 1,200 crores. it accepted the latter figure. This firmness, however, is deceptive and further, it

does not appear to have been based on rational or intelligent anticipation of the possible consequences of deficit financing of this magnitude and preparedness to meet these consequences by counter-measures worked into the body of the Plan which it finally placed before the public. And because behind its stand there was no studied defence, the Commission accepted, without a murmur, the implied censure that the Plan it had put up would not be able to meet the consequences of this order of deficit financing and has to be substantially strengthened for the purpose by raising the target of foodgrains. If the target for food grains lacked any basis which could stand scrutiny, what could one say of its other targets? How could one be sure that the targets are consistent, that they are the optimum attainable and that,

in fact, they would be attained?

The question of village industries, however, has sometimes been discussed, though perfunctorily, at the expert level but thinking on the subject has been dominated all through by the group within Congress which stands for a creed radically different from that of the Avadi resolution, later passed by Parliament which commits Congress as well as the present Government to "planning with a view to the establishment of a Socialistic pattern of society where the principal means of production are under social ownership or control, production is progressively speeded up and there is equitable distribution of national wealth".

In the attempt to skip a step in the jump to planned development at a high level of industrialisation, the struggle with primitive, communism has proved harder for the Government so far than struggle with vested interests in the private sector. The issue, however, has not been squarely faced by the Planning Commission. The Commission has chosen the line of least resistance, and toed the political line rather than make its authority felt.

True, implementation of the Plan is not the responsibility of the Planning Commission but would it not be interpreting its functions too narrowly to suggest that, the Commission need not go beyond laying down what must be pretty obvious viz. that the "plan resolves itself into a series of well defined administrative tasks", which fall primarily in the public sector? Not that the Commission itself disowns all responsibility in this matter. Take one of the tasks which is naturally of fundamental importance, when a large expansion of industry is being planned in the public sector. What should be the form of organisation for developing industry? How could Parliamentary control be reconciled with efficient management of industry which enlists for initiative, speed and flexibility of operation, none of which can be expected under the present system of cumbersome, vexatious and time consuming departmental administration?

De-centralisation of the economy both in the sense of location of industries and in terms of distribution of economic power is one of the professed objectives. An inevitable feature of underdevelopment is the shortage of administrative organisation and enterprise. So there is natural tendency towards concentra-

tion, both within and outside the Government. This tendency is strengthened and not countered when Parliament is alert enough to exercise its authority but not wise or experienced enough to devolve control and share responsibility. Parliamentary wisdom takes or rather should take -for in this matter, experience is limited and yet inadequate the form of accepting gracefully certain conventions and codes of behaviour on the one hand and of appropriate organisations on the other. This is certainly one of the Key Factors in Development, not the elementary exercises in arithmetical ratios which the Plan parades in a section under this title. But what has the Planning Commission to say on "questions relating to the organisation of public enterprises"? They are "under constant review and greater experience is needed before a clear view as to relative advantages of different forms of organisations emerges". There is much to be said for keeping an open mind but surely this is not a virtue in framing the integral parts of a Plan?

Apart from industries in the public sector, there is also the important consideration of administration of projects and implementation of the various schemes in which also the plan finally divides itself. The present dilatory financial procedure, it has been bitterly complained, has been responsible for many of the lapses and shortfalls in expenditure which is the only measure we have got of performance. On this vital question the Plan is discreetly silent.

Finally, there is the question of railways. Any one in trade or industry will confidently say that what finally dispose of the Plan is: Transport, Shri K C Neogy's caveat was that not only we are trying to do too much, railways would not be able to move the goods and the Plan will be caught in a transport bottleneck. What he wanted was a larger allocation to the railways. There is no question that railways have an enormous job to do. Pandit Nehru himself has suggested increase in passenger fares to keep down traffic. The Railway Minister followed with an announcement that the number of passenger trains would be cut and the number of goods trains increased. Right on the top of this comes the announcement that concession return tickets, promised in the railway budget speech, would soon be introduced. Meanwhile, a whispering campaign has started about the

capacity of our railway system and how much of it is being actually utilised. And these doubts have not been laid to rest by the finding of *the* Estimates Committee that railways keep no statistics which can answer this question and any way, they do not use the statistics which they collect. The Commission does not even attempt to say how the relative claims of production and transport could be reconciled without wrecking the plan in the process.

All along the line, there is vacillation and reluctance to come to grips with concrete problems. This raises the uneasy thought, was it the Planning Commission which produced the Plan? Platitudes can be produced at less cost and if they are no good unless they come from the highest level, there is no dearth of politicians in the country to do the job. Indeed it is difficult to escape the impression that the Commission must have been so busy with ad hoc enquiries with which it is pestered all the time that its major assignment was also treated on an ad hoc basis. This voluminous document should be the last of the series. The Planning Commission is supposed to be an Expert Body and is not charged with execution except the Community Project Administration, the planning part of which should alone be its responsibility. The lime has come when it has to be made into a proper expert body, which will formulate the plan and place it before Government. So that, we can be sure what exactly the Commission recommended, and where exactly Government fails in execution. The separation of functions between the Planning Commission and the Cabinet is obscured and negated by the presence on it of the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. It was perhaps desirable at one stage that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru should take up the Chairmanship of the Commission when planning was new to the country and support had to be gained for so novel an idea. Now it is no longer necessary. There are other means of extending the support of the Government to the Commission in the latter's dealings with the State Governments which are probably the most difficult part of its present undertaking. It is high time that the Commission concentrated on the main job of planning and equipped itself properly for it by recruiting a select team of high level technical experts, who are completely independent of the Ministries and departments of Government,