

No, Mr Patterson can be barely left out of any discussion on Tibet. On the other hand, there is equally no doubt that what Pandit Nehru has said so far in the Lok Sabha, is a serious wider-statement of the facts. We hope this will soon be remedied; for if rumour and conjecture are to be quashed, facts must be put out; and nothing can be more dangerous in the present situation than to allow rumour to run free and wild.

A number of Indian newspapers have already suggested that Peking should enable a team of independent press-men, at least from this country, to enter Tibet and see the situation for themselves. The suggestion is well worth taking. Unfortunately, it must be confessed that Peking is not likely to take it. If Pandit Nehru himself was refused entry into Lhasa, it is not probable that lesser men will succeed in gaining it. And yet, if they don't, China must continue to suffer its case being badly distorted in a dozen ways.

For, as we have said, China does have a case. Its only fault so far appears to be that it has tried to do too much too quickly in Tibet.

No one will suggest that the Chinese have made no mistakes, or that they have not aroused certain suspicions in Tibetan minds regarding their intentions. Peking knows that, slow as the pace of reforms may appear by communist standards, it has been too revolutionary for a country which has for centuries been steeped in tradition and where the theocratic despotism of the ruler's has, paradoxically, a deep root in popular following. There are reports that China has greatly stepped up the settlement of Chinese in Tibet, and that this may have precipitated the present troubles. Whatever it is, Peking should remember that it is committed to maintaining Tibetan autonomy, and that no kind of direct or indirect pressure would be Justifiable in avoiding that commitment. The Khampas are not a people to put up with pressure; and Peking would be wise to avoid exciting their suspicions, and particularly to avoid giving any semblance of wanting to humble the exalted position of the Dalai Lama.

In this country there seems to be a great deal of public concern over

the reported events in Tibet and the Government is under considerable pressure from the Opposition members to intervene. The concern is natural. India and Tibet have ancient and historic links which bind them together. But it is as well to realise straight away that there is very little that India can do without appearing to interfere in the internal affairs of a neighbouring country. India's relations with China are also friendly; and China has previously made it quite plain that it resents the proffering of even friendly counsel from New Delhi, as far as Tibetan affairs are concerned. Perhaps, if things prove to have gone too far, Pandit Nehru may risk another rebuff from Peking by sounding a word of warning in Its own interests. But, beyond that it is difficult to see what India can do, or even ought to do. We in this country can only hope that the gravity of the situation is over-rated, and that Peking will be both willing and able to restore normalcy in Lhasa after mutual consultations with the Dalai Lama.

Why No Paper ?

THE shortage of paper, particularly the shortage of writing and printing paper, with its usual concomitants, blackmarketing, non-availability of stocks and exorbitant prices, has become a scandal of some standing. While inaugurating the first conference of the Federation of Paper Traders' Association in Bombay in the middle of last month, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri had promised to take steps to alleviate the situation. He admitted that there was shortage of paper but he was in no position to promise what the Paper Trader' wanted -freer imports. The long-run solution, of course, is to step up internal production and the Minister told the Federation that a committee had been set up to examine schemes for the manufacture of paper which had been held up on account of foreign exchange difficulties.

But, assuming more production units or substantial expansion in existing units, there would be the usual time lag of two to three years before they can start production. How is paper supply to be main-

tained, with continuously increasing demand, until then? What about immediate relief? On the part of the Government, which is by far the largest consumer of paper in the country, Shri Shastri promised a cut in consumption of 10%. This is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough.

The fact is that though import cuts had made the situation bad, the failure of the paper mills and paper dealers to maintain proper distribution has made it a great deal worse' As there is no statutory control on the price of paper, it would not be strictly correct to talk of paper being sold in the black market. There is, however, a gentleman's agreement that paper mills would supply and distribute to dealers at a fair price and make sure that the dealers do not profiteer. And this system has simply not been operating at all. Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, referring to the difficult plight of the paper traders, had said in the course of his address:

"About six months back when there were wide-spread and serious complaints about the shortage of

paper and excessive price charges, we had occasion to meet representatives of the paper industry. It was found that while the paper mills had not materially raised their prices, some sections of the trade, taking advantage of the increased demand had been charging prices higher than legitimately allowed to them. It was, therefore, decided that the paper mills would publicise the fair reselling rates of various categories of paper and would enjoin upon their distributors and dealers to maintain supplies to bona fide customers at the level of supply in 1957."

Mark the word 'enjoin' Exhortation, and particularly persuasion, the Minister did believe, would secure equitable distribution of paper at a fair price and this has since been followed up by a Commerce Ministry press note which repeats almost verbatim what the Minister had said earlier. "After detailed discussions with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry/" says the Press note, "representatives of the paper Industry have agreed to supply to all consumers paper of different varieties at the same level as in 1957. They

have also agreed that, if any of the dealers or distributors fails to comply with this decision, the mills will take disciplinary action against the dealer or distributor concerned even to the extent of removing him from that position." The press note adds that the industry has agreed that the re-sale price of paper will not be more than 7½ per cent above the mill rate, excluding sales and other taxes.

Those who are at all familiar with the actual situation prevailing in the P&per market today would be faintly amused by the naivete of the Ministry in putting forward all this seriously, but could the Ministry be really as ignorant as all that? While the fact of shortage is undeniable, the supply position has not actually deteriorated over the year. On the contrary, despite the much sharper cut in imports, production of printing and writing paper which is what matters most has increased substantially from 1,31,000 in 1957 to 1,58,000 in 1958.

The increase in domestic production has much more than offset the reduction in imports. Even then the situation is so much worse compared to what it was a year ago. Why? Trade stocks carried over from a more comfortable year may have been depleted. Demand may also have suddenly jumped—this is possible, but not certain. But what is not a matter of speculation is that it is larger production which has brought about this signal deterioration in the distribution system. This is because the old order in paper distribution, on which the system had functioned, has been disrupted. Fair distribution was possible in the past, because the major producers were interested in their manufacturing profits only and could, therefore, exercise a healthy control on their distributors. It is common knowledge that this is no longer the case. What is, then, the point in the Ministry issuing such a pious statement? Did manufacturers ever say that they would insist on their dealers selling black and having a cut in the price? And how unctiously the Ministry absolves itself of all responsibility! Members of the public having specific complaints, the press note continues, are advised to write to the Development Officer (Timber and Cellulose Industries), giving details of the complaint regarding over-charging of prices or non-supply of paper and fur-

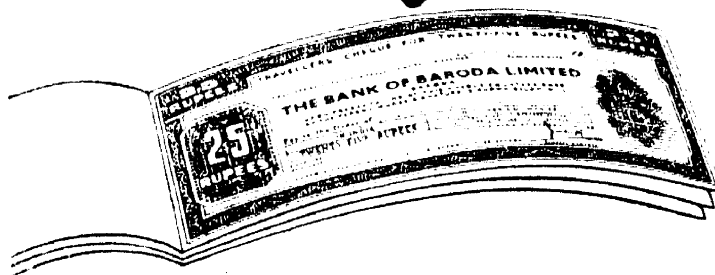
mailing documentary proof. No action, the press note self-righteously adds, can be taken on the basis of vague and general complaints about the non-availability of paper. Does the high moral code of the Ministry prevent it from going to the market and finding out the facts? The shops of the Delhi paper

merchants are not so far away from the Development Wing, and a visit would be more rewarding, if the Ministry wanted the facts, than inviting complaints through the press! Dealers who complain will get the sack and regular consumers who have the temerity to do so, may lose their source of supply.

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