

# Weekly Notes

## *Internal Migration of Population*

DR P S LOKANATHAN in his presidential address to the Indian Society of Labour Economics made a pointed reference to the emergence of an 'elite' among the working classes from the increasing inequality of wages. "The varying rates of growth of productivity coupled with the existing and likely future distribution of organised labour mean that the existing wide gap between industrial wage levels and those in other sectors (is) likely to widen even more", he said.

The wage differentials emphasised by Dr Lokanathan indicate the failure of planned development to pool the gains of higher productivity for the benefit of the economy as a whole. Pooling of these gains boils down to a policy for restraint of wages and other expenses in the organised sector, and utilisation of the surplus emerging from higher productivity for reinvestment.

Apart from a concern with the effects of differential productivity, Dr Lokanathan makes an important and practical suggestion for promoting greater mobility of rural labour and for a training programme to impart scarce skills. As a palliative to rural underemployment and unemployment, setting up village industries for creating non-agricultural employment has been the standard prescription though this has not proved easy in practice. Dr Lokanathan has an alternative to offer which may be limited in its scope, but nevertheless, is worth trying. He has suggested the establishment of Migration Hoards to promote greater mobility of rural population and encourage internal migration, not from villages to towns which are already overcrowded, but from over-populated rural areas to rural areas, mostly in other States, where population pressure is very much lower. The techno-economic surveys of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh by the National Council of Applied Economic Research had drawn attention to the excessive population pressure in North Bihar and the existence of large tracts in Madhya Pradesh where much land could be brought under cultivation by importing an adequate labour force.

Some internal migration has gone on all the time, but the process seems to have been retarded after independence, with the States becoming more and more conscious of their separateness. The scope for internal migration however is still extensive. In Assam for instance, population pressure is very low in many parts and full advantage has been taken of this by Muslims from the over-populated districts of West Bengal who are hungry for land and energetic, adventurous and hard-working. This process of infiltration is perhaps still going on. That is not to say, however, that Assam will welcome migrants from a neighbouring State. The suggestion, however, deserves to be pursued, and prospects for such internal migration systematically mapped out.

## *North-South Metre Gauge*

ANY extension of the metre gauge railway system in the country may appear to be anomalous at a time when efforts are being made to convert metre gauge rail sections into broad gauge. A two-gauge railway system creates complicated problems of transshipment at break-of-gauge points and introduces many difficulties in regard to the proper utilisation of equipment. In this light the decision taken decades ago to construct metre-gauge railway lines though the main railway system in India was broad gauge has often been criticised. The choice at the time, however, was not one between broad gauge and metre gauge but between a metre gauge railway line and none at all. In most areas, given the heavy capital cost involved in the construction of a broad gauge railway line and the small volume of traffic that could be expected to develop over the line, a broad gauge line would not have been economically justified.

The position today, however, is so different that the construction of new metre gauge railway lines would not ordinarily be justified. Steps are in fact being taken to convert certain sections from metre gauge to broad gauge where the volume of traffic justifies the change as an alternative to doubling of metre gauge lines or

other methods of increasing capacity. For the present, no doubt, this is being done only for isolated sections but in due course it will presumably be done throughout the country. In spite of all this, the construction of the Khandwa-Hingoli metre gauge rail link is welcome, because it will bring about a substantial improvement in the efficiency of the existing metre gauge system. So long as a large metre gauge railway system remains, any step that will increase its efficiency would be welcome.

The importance of the Khandwa-Hingoli railway line lies not so much in the volume of traffic that will originate or terminate within it, but in the link it establishes between two large metre gauge systems that have hitherto been separated from each other by a gap of nearly two hundred miles at the nearest point. The effects of the construction of the line on the economy of the region through which it passes will be merely incidental, though by no means insignificant. The linking of the northern and southern metre gauge systems which has now been brought about will have three advantages. Traffic originating from points on one of the metre gauge systems for destinations on the other metre gauge system will now be able to flow directly without transshipment, thus reducing the cost of transport and increasing the utilisation of railway equipment. The pooling of metre gauge wagons from the two systems which the link will make possible will also increase the efficiency of railway transportation considerably, there being a definite difference between the seasonal patterns of demand for wagons between the two systems. The link will also provide an alternative route for north-south traffic that has hitherto moved mainly by broad gauge. The Khandwa-Hingoli rail link is an outstanding example of a strategic investment which brings returns out of all proportion to the capital invested though many of these returns can never be directly measured but are nonetheless real. Opportunities for such strategic investment must be sought to utilize the country's limited resources.