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CONGRESS AND THE MASSES

H. C. MOOKERJEE M. A., Ph. D.

*Editor-in-Chief, Calcutta Review, Author
of Indians in British Industries,
Prohibition in India, et .*



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FOREWORD

The history of India's freedom struggle—or, for that matter, of any freedom struggle anywhere in the world,—is the history of transference of real political and economic power from one particular class, alien or indigenous, to the whole people. That struggle is still on in India. From 1885 to 1945, and particularly during the last twenty-five years, the Indian National Congress has grown in strength or weakened itself insofar as it reflected the will of its 400 millions to free existence, insofar as it made itself both the embodiment of their aspirations and the instrument of their political destiny.

From an annual assemblage of distinguished petitioners to His Britannic Majesty, the Congress became in 1942 that organ of the people's will ; and, confident of that invincible power, it demanded of India's rulers to quit. Even on that occasion, the Congress did not seek power for itself as a party. "Power, when it comes," concluded the historic resolution of the Bombay A. I. O. C. in 1942 August, "will belong to the whole people of India."

Has the Congress as a political organization justified to the extent that lay in its power, its claim to speak for the teeming millions irrespective of their religious creeds or group allegiances ? While fighting against the "mournful monotony of compulsory peace" that Gandhiji saw in the vast prison house called India, has it sought to voice the aspirations of its vast dumb majority ? Or was it only seeking to enthrone

over them a vociferous minority of "Brahmins and Banias" as its enemies and detractors from Winston Churchill to M. N. Roy or Mahomed Ali Jinnah over ?

In Prof. Mookerjee's **Congress and the Masses**, we have a well-known Indian Christian leader answering these queries. He examines with dispassionate detachment the Congress record of service to the masses. His own strong views as a Nationalist do not affect his objectivity in this detailed survey of the professions and practices, resolutions, achievements, guiding principles, authoritative utterances of its leaders, administrative record of its ministers, all from the point of view of a lover of the people that he has always been, all in a manner that should satisfy any unprejudiced student of public affairs. The 'record' of other political organisations in the same field is not left out by the author. Nor does he fail to hold the searchlight on all the charges that its opponents, critics and calumniators have levelled at their leisure.

The country is in the midst of another election. We will certainly be hearing all sorts of slogans and screaming headlines about religion, liberties, economic interests of one group or another having been or likely to be in danger at the hands of the Congress. At such a time, an impartial investigation by a reputed public man of Prof. Mookerjee's calibre, with his undeniable claim to the friendship of all communities and political party leaders, should amply satisfy both the conscious voter and the conscientious searcher after truth. His elaborate references to a wide variety of authorities serve to enhance the force of his own conclusions.

Today, as in 1942, if the Indian National Congress voices the urge of all down-trodden East, it is because it has consistently stood, under the leadership of Gandhiji, of the ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-sheltered millions of India's fields and factories. Tomorrow, if it is to emerge as their successful liberator, the Congress will have to transform itself increasingly into the champion, not of an empty demand for change of bureaucratic colour, but of a peaceful democratic revolution in the Indian society. The Congress is rightly proud of its past, because it has based itself on the people. The Congress is confident of the future—for it has established itself, despite its weaknesses, as the only organisation capable and willing to translate into reality their hope : a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

K. M. Munshi

PREFACE

It was my privilege first, as President of the All-India Council of Indian Christians, and then, as its General Organising Secretary, to visit in the period 1937 to 1944, many large Christian Indian centres in all British Indian Provinces except Sind and the N. W. F., and in nearly thirty Indian States. While, in a majority of cases, I was, at these places, the guest of my brothers in faith, I was also the recipient of most generous hospitality from my non-Christian brethren, Caste and Scheduled Caste Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsis.

Many of these friends afforded me opportunities of seeing for myself the activities sponsored by different political, social service, and educational organisations not the least among which were those either affiliated to, or sympathising with, the Congress.

Some of the information gathered in this way was incorporated in contributions made to different periodicals, a selection from which, after necessary additions and alterations, appears in the following pages. Their only merit, if they have any, lies in the fact that they give my reactions to what was actually seen.

A certain amount of repetition which the reader will notice here and there and which is deliberate, is due to my desire to make every chapter a complete whole.

I am grateful to the editors of the *Modern Review*, *Social Welfare*, *Indian Christian Patriot*, *Forward*, *Search-*

light and *Calcutta Review* for their permission to use such among the following chapters as appeared originally in their columns. I should also be failing in my duty if I did not acknowledge the assistance received from Mr. B. N. Bannerjee M. Sc., (Cal), Dip Lib (London), F. L. A., University Librarian, Central Library, Calcutta University, and Mr. A. K. Mookerje M. A., Librarian, Bengal Legislative Assembly. I am grateful to these gentlemen for their courtesy in placing promptly at my disposal the official publications issued by the different Provincial Governments as well as such other books as I had occasion to consult from time to time.

CALCUTTA,
The 1st December, 1945.

H. C. Mookerjee

*Dedicated
to the Memory of that
Good and Faithful
Servant of India
the late*

SHREE MAHADEV DESAI

*who was the first
to suggest that the author
should put on record
his impressions of
the economic and social
activities of the Congress*

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CHAPTER I

INDIAN POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS AND THE MASSES

When we think of Indian political organisations, the one which immediately and, almost automatically, suggests itself is the Indian National Congress, for the foundation of which Mr. A. D. Hume who had retired as Secretary of the British administration was largely responsible. Englishmen, Parsis, Hindus, Muslims, and Christian Indians have, since 1885, when it was first organised, nursed it to its present greatness. It is not only the oldest but the largest, the most influential, and the most efficiently organised of our political parties. And it is remarkable that the other parties, organised since its establishment, owe their existence to men who, at one time or other in their political career, had given the Congress their allegiance and served their apprenticeship in it.

The next important political party, the Muslim League, was founded in 1906, under circumstances to which no reference can be made here, with the twin objects of promoting loyalty to the British Government, and protecting and advancing the political rights and interests of our Mahomedan brethren through "respectful representation." During the days of the Khilafat agitation, the Congress and the Muslim League worked together, then followed communal clashes and the two communities drifted apart. Our Mussalman brethren co-operated with the Simon Commission which was boycotted by Hindus

and the Congress and this, to a certain extent, widened the breach between them.

The Muslim League did not make much of a show during the first elections held under the Government of India Act, 1935. Then came the formation of Congress ministries largely Hindu in composition with a few Congress Muslims who were accused of betraying their community. Mr. M. A. Jinnah promptly seized hold of this opportunity and conducted exceedingly successful propaganda against the Congress raising the twin cries of Islamic religion and culture in danger and Hindu persecution of helpless Muslims. It has gathered strength till today the Muslim League is undoubtedly the champion of the rights and privileges and, occasionally, of the unreasonable claims of our Mahomedan brethren.

The first important session of the Hindu Mahasabha was held at Benares in 1923, with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in the chair and the next in December, 1924, at Belgaum also with him as the President. He explained the reasons for organising it as follows :

The necessity for organising the Mahasabha had arisen because the Congress being a political body could not deal with questions which affected various (Hindu) communities in social and other non-political spheres.

Lala Lajput Rai, the President of the Calcutta sessions of the Hindu Mahasabha, stressed the same idea in 1925, when he said that

The Hindu Sabhas should make no encroachment on the province of the Congress, except so far as purely communal questions are concerned.

It is in 1933, when Bhai Parmanand presided over the annual meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha at Ajmer that we first find this organisation striking the purely communal note. Here he is reported to have said :

I feel an impulse in me that the Hindus will willingly co-operate with Great Britain if their status and responsible position as the premier community in India is recognised in the political institutions of new India.

The radical change undergone by the Hindu Mahasabha under its new leadership became clear in 1938, when Mr. V. D. Savarkar in his presidential address delivered at Nagpur said :

Our politics hereafter will be purely Hindu politics fashioned and tested in Hindu terms only, in such wise as will help the consolidation, freedom, and life-growth of our Hindu Nation.

. Role of Capitalists In Our Political Organisations

That enterprising American journalist, Mr. Louis Fischer, is the author of a small but interesting book, *A Week with Gandhi* published some time ago. This is nothing but the diary he kept of the week he spent at Sevagram from June 4 to June 10, 1942. On page 51 of this book, we have an account of a conversation Mr. Fischer had with Mahatma Gandhi in regard to the financing of Congress activities. The question put was whether there is any truth in the views expressed by highly placed British officials that,

Congress was in the hands of big business and that Gandhi was supported by the Bombay mill owners who gave him as much money as he wanted.

The answer was that not only were such assertions true but also that, practically, all the expenses for Congress work were met out of contributions received from "rich Indians".

Fischer : "Doesn't the fact that Congress gets its money from the moneyed interests affect Congress politics? Doesn't it create a kind of moral obligation ?

Gandhi : It creates a silent debt. But actually we are very little influenced by the thinking of the rich... You are right, however, that the dependence of the Congress on rich sponsors is unfortunate. (I use the word unfortunate). It does not pervert our policy.

To prove that the financial assistance thus received makes no difference in the economic policy of the Congress, Mahatma Gandhi referred to the "advanced social programmes and schemes for economic planning" adopted by the Congress under the inspiration of Jawaharlal. We might also remember, in this connection, the various organisations started under Congress auspices for the social and economic uplift of the masses.

All this goes to show that the presence of rich Indians in the Congress has not led to the neglect of the interests of the people at large through apprehensions of forfeiting their financial backing as also that the Congress has laid down a programme which, while benefiting the masses, undoubtedly constitutes a serious, though as yet, an indirect, threat to vested interests.

Mr. V. D. Savarkar in his address entitled *The Next Step* delivered before the Brahman Sabha in 1939, explained the economic programme of the Hindu Mahasabha by saying that it was pledged to the protection of property. One of his critics, Mr. Narayan Sadashiv Bapat, has shown in his *Nationalism Versus Communalism* that, from the context in which this pronouncement appears, it follows that he meant capitalism.

As effective protection of both capitalists and workers is a contradiction in terms and, as the choice today, is between protection of the former to ensure the continuance of their profits and the safeguarding of the latter from exploitation through which profits are principally earned, Mr. Bapat feels that this single pronouncement of the President of the Hindu Mahasabha bars out all prospects of the adoption by this organisation of steps sufficiently

drastic to bring about an appreciable measure of improvement in the economic condition of the masses.

It is true that I have not come across any such clear pronouncement from any spokesman of the Muslim League as regards its attitude towards the masses. But I cannot forget that it has not, so far as I am aware, anywhere condemned unequivocally the economic exploitation of the masses by their betters nor has it laid down in clear terms, a programme for their betterment.

Criticisms of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, from this point of view, would lose much of their force if they could give their support to the abolition of private landlordism which, by interposing itself between the State and the actual cultivators of the soil, has prospered so far at the expense of both. But they can hardly afford to take this step as it would immediately lead to the financial loss, if not the utter ruin, of most of the leaders and their strongest supporters.

To sum up, what is common to all these organisations is that capitalists are to be found in all three of them and are financing their various activities. The capitalists inside the Congress realised long ago that, however generous their contributions, they cannot expect that, to oblige them, the Congress will stay its hands in regard to implementing a programme for the economic uplift of the masses. In one word, they cannot hope to influence the economic policy of the Congress. Their brethren, however, who are in the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha and who are supreme there, have managed to secure such power that they are able to lay down the policies—political, social, and economic. As the interests of landlords, bankers, industrialists and, in general, big

businessmen are diametrically opposed to those of tenants, industrial workers, borrowers, etc., it follows that the last two have not been able to either frame or to consistently follow any clear-cut programme for the betterment of the economic condition of the masses.

Congress Concern For The Masses

An attempt will now be made to find out the nature and the amount of the services rendered or proposed to be rendered by the above three political organisations for improving the lot of the masses.

The declared policy of the Congress had been to wreck the constitution conferred on India under the India Act of 1935, from within. But when Congress ministries were actually formed, they came to realise what an opportunity, of course within limits, they had to benefit the Indian people as a whole. The Congress, as also individual Congressman, had given many pledges to the people at large. These commenced demanding their fulfilment. Pressure also came from the Left Wing of the Congress.

Prof. L. F. Rushbrook Williams who was responsible for many years for the report which the India Government had to submit to the Parliament and who can, by no stretch of imagination, be said to be favourably disposed towards this organisation, was fair enough to recognise the good work Congress ministries attempted to get through and bore testimony to it in the following terms on page 138 of his *What About India?* published in the Summer of 1938 :

They (Congress ministries) have embarked upon an energetic programme of education, both primary and secondary, with emphasis upon handicraft and vocational training. They are devoting much attention to village uplift, to the difficult relations between landlords and tenants. Broadly speaking, they deserve much credit for what they are doing; they are completely in earnest and are working desperately hard.

Prof. R. Coupland writing about three years later, to be exact, in February, 1941, after the Congress ministries had resigned over the war issue, paid them the following compliment on page 84 of his *Britain and India*.

In matters that closely touched the welfare of the mass of the people such as land tenure, rural development and education, they (Congress ministries,) showed an honesty of public spirit not always to be found in democratic office-holders.

The Indian who has kept himself posted in regard to the many improvements introduced by the Congress ministries in the different provinces and who knows something about the difficulties they had to surmount to maintain law and order, is aware that it is easy to say much more as regards the conscientious and successful way in which the different problems were tackled. I have intentionally refrained from mentioning them here because I feel that the praise which has come from such critical quarters as the above two will carry greater weight than that coming from me, an admirer of this our only non-communal organisation. What has to be emphasised here is that these two gentlemen have not suggested anywhere that the Congress ministries made even the slightest attempt to manage things in such a way as to benefit any particular community at the expense of the others.

Neither the Muslim League nor the Hindu Mahasabha was, after the last elections, able to form ministries by itself in any one of the provinces though the former did*

have a fairly large number of its members in the cabinet of one, if not of two, provinces. It may therefore be argued that we have no means to find out what these organisations would have done for the benefit of the masses if they had occupied all the seats in the cabinets in question. Nonetheless one can make a fair enough guess at what they would have done if all the responsibility for laying down and implementing the policy had been theirs, from the pronouncements of their leaders and spokesmen.

In this connection, the attention of the reader may be drawn to the recommendation of the Sind Muslim League Conference held in October, 1938, where Mussalmans were exhorted to wear Khadi and Swadeshi cloth manufactured by Muslim weavers, to patronise Muslim shopkeepers and to secure employment for their co-religionists which is surprising in view of the fact that Sind is a pronouncedly Muslim majority province where it is the Hindu who, if anybody, stands in need of special protection.

This challenge was met by a resolution of the Nagpur session of the Hindu Mahasabha about three months later, to be exact in the last week of December, 1938, calling upon Hindus to "purchase from Hindu shopkeepers only" etc.

This is in startling contrast to the policy of the All-India Spinners Association, a recent report of which shows that spinners and weavers of all communities are welcomed and purchasers of Khadi are expected to patronise their cloth irrespective of the religion professed by the workers.

The only conclusion the man with an open mind would be entitled to draw from the facts set forth

above is that if either the Muslim League or the Hindu Mahasabha leaders had their way, they would have unhesitatingly tried their best to benefit the members of the community to which they belong. It is also correct to hold that exhortations of this type are nothing but political stunts, their one aim being to deceive the poor and the illiterate into the belief that the economic interests of the Hindu and Mussalman masses are not identical and, in a word, to promote selfishness on a mass scale. This attitude is natural in members of the classes from which the leaders of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha are drawn whose one purpose in encouraging separatist feelings is to ensure the enjoyment and extension of prestige, political power, and economic security by exploiting the educational and the economic backwardness of the masses of their community.

Communal Organisations And The Masses

I hope I shall be forgiven if I suggest that, in view of the facts stated above, there is ample justification for the view that the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha are organisations controlled by, and very largely composed of, men of the upper classes whose concern for the welfare of the masses is not very great. It cannot be proved that, till the political support of the masses had to be secured for securing political power, either of these two organisations made any effort to establish direct contact with them or to take any effective steps to raise their educational and economic status.

So far as the great Mussalman community is concerned, some well-known Muslim organisations which draw their members from the poorer classes have publicly and

formally disclaimed all connection with the Muslim League. Probably every one familiar with the Momin movement is aware that this section of our Mussalman brethren which claims to constitute 50 per cent or more of the total Muslim population of India, has complained more than once that its political support has been exploited by the upper class Muslim leaders, generally members of the Muslim League, for their own purposes. It has even gone so far as to state that the cloth manufactured by these people, a majority of whom are weavers, is rarely, if ever, bought and used by the upper class Muslim leaders. The intensity of the bitter feelings entertained by them may be judged from the fact that they have demanded separate seats in local organisations and in the legislatures because they feel that this is the only way of securing what they consider their dues.

In the case of the Hindu Mahasabha, I cannot say that I have come across an account of any Hindu organisation charging the better-class Hindu leaders with exploitation of the Hindu masses for selfish purposes. One explanation of this may be that, in the last elections, the Congress depended on Hindu votes and captured nearly all the "general" seats. I cannot, however, allow myself to forget the Brahmin and non-Brahmin controversy of South India nor the ill feelings entertained, generally by members of the Scheduled Castes, against their socially superior co-religionists.

The Hindu Mahasabha did not, in the past, display much interest in the well-being of the masses, neither had it inside its fold disinterested workers pledged to mass uplift. Nor can it be said with truth that the Hindu Mahasabha provided the necessary leadership. The

natural consequence of all this was that the hard work and, along with it, its reward, political leadership, passed into the hands of the Congress.

I would like a straight-forward answer to an equally straight-forward question and that question is what has the Hindu Mahasabha been doing all these years for the masses ? If the answer is that those who are its members today were working inside the Congress, may it be asked what has induced them to fall in love with a programme different from that of the Congress ? Is it because they feel that Hindu interests are suffering and, if so, who are the Hindus whose interests are suffering ? Are these Hindus actual cultivators, artisans, and handicraftsmen ? If so, in what way exactly have their interests been threatened ? Have these interests been threatened on an All-India scale or in certain parts of our motherland and, if so, what are the areas affected ? And what are the steps, if any, taken on an All-India and on a Provincial basis for removing them ? When were these taken and with what effect ?

The information at our disposal goes to show that the Hindu Mahasabha has received a fresh lease of life on account of new recruitment, but this has come from those among the poor belonging to the middle class who, in joining the Mahasabha, have merely imitated their betters who constitute the majority of the members and, in many cases, to please them.

I hope I shall not be called uncharitable if I suggest that, judging them by their past record, not only are both the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha composed of upper class people who have not taken much interest in the welfare of the masses but also that when their

leaders have sought contact with the masses, they have done so with the sole purpose of exploiting their religious sentiments for their own ends. They have co-operated with the British Government, as long as it has been possible for them to do so and have asked favours from Government and been thankful when they have been received. In order to consolidate their position with the British Government, they have claimed to represent either Hindu or Muslim interests as the case may be and tried to make their position secure by appealing to the fanaticism of the Hindu and Muslim masses. They have rarely, if ever, fought for any concession for the masses which, to my mind, is the one and only test to prove their concern for the masses and for genuine leadership.

If the Muslim League has talked about the rights of the "Muslim nation" and of "Muslim interests", the Hindu Mahasabha has not been behindhand with its talk of "Hindu interests" and the "Hindu nation." The loud outcry of the Muslim League about Muslim culture has its counterpart in the equally loud outcry of the Hindu Mahasabha about Hindu culture. The accusation of communalism raised by the Muslim League is countered by a similar accusation on the part of the Hindu Mahasabha. Both are equally good or, as their critics hold, equally bad.

It is true that the Muslim League has sought the support of non-Muslim minorities on the plea of championing their interests in addition to its own. The Hindu Mahasabha, confident in its All-India majority, has met the challenge by seeking to enlarge the connotation of the term Hindu so as to include within it every one born and bred in India and loving our glorious motherland.

Both these appeals, however, are due to the fundamental desire to strengthen their influence in the political sphere. In one word, neither the one nor the other organisation, in spite of very loud assertions about its patriotism, has yet succeeded in establishing its reputation for what I am prepared to characterise as disinterested action interpreted in terms of the welfare of the masses.

Two Striking Instances

I give below two examples, both well-authenticated, of the way in which the leaders of these two communal organisations seek to keep apart the Hindu and Muslim communities from each other and that for their own ends.

The first of these occurred when the Krishak Praja Party of Bengal composed of Mussalman nationalists representing rural Muslim voters was co-operating with the Congress inside the Provincial Legislature and the combination was growing more and more formidable as distinct signs of wavering were appearing among certain members of the Coalition Government Party. The plan of the campaign was to discredit the Krishak Praja Party with their rural supporters. The Muslim League leaders, educated and economically very well off Mussalmans, were touring these areas and addressing Mussalman audiences drummed up, it was said, with the assistance of minor officials of the Co-operative and Debt Settlement departments. A very prominent member of the Cabinet, a member of the Muslim League, while addressing an audience of uneducated Mussalman villagers is reported

to have said that those Mussalman members of the Legislative Assembly who were voting with the Congress would, on the day of resurrection, rise with Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose, the leader of the Congress party in the legislature, while those who were voting with him would rise with the Muslim Leaguers, all orthodox Mahomedans. The implication was that those Mussalmans who would rise with a non-Mussalman in the day of judgement would not go to heaven. The danger of crude propaganda of this type is that, carried a step further, it becomes a distinct incitement to violence where ignorant and illiterate people such as the audience then being addressed are concerned.

Nor can the Hindu Mahasabha be held blameless for it too has been guilty of equally foolish conduct. In July, 1939, some Shias of Lucknow who are nationalists by conviction made a gesture of goodwill to which wise statesmanship would have accorded an enthusiastic welcome. The local Shia organisation made ceremonial gift of a cow and her calf to the local Hindu Mahasabha declaring that to cement goodwill between its members and those of the Hindu Mahasabha and, in fact, with the Hindu community in general, its members would give up for good the use of beef and sought permission to enrol themselves as members of the Hindu Mahasabha. If the report which appeared in a very well-known Mahasabha organ is to be relied on, the Lucknow Mahasabha referred the whole matter to the All-India President of this organisation. His decision was that, while he welcomed such instances of co-operation, it was his opinion that the Shias should continue to remain members of their own organisation and not join the Hindu Mahasabha.

It may, of course, be urged that he felt that the time for merging the Lucknow Shia and Mahasabha organisations into one had not yet come, but I would request every one to ask himself whether the refusal to consider a unique offer of this type is not likely to incline at least some people to the opinion that the Hindu Mahasabha, in spite of its vigorous protests to the contrary, continues to look on our Mussalman brethren as *mlechhas*, that is untouchables. It also knocks on the head the idea that the Hindu Mahasabha is genuinely desirous of welcoming the entry of non-Hindus inside its fold.

Communalism in Different Economic Levels

I maintain that communalism, so far as the economically better-off classes, whether Hindu or Muslim, are concerned, is largely due to the mischievous activities of leaders who desire to retain the power they already enjoy or of those ambitious of acquiring political power. The economic motive of communalism comes into play in the case of the middle class the quarrel being over the distribution of jobs. It is also operative among the poorer classes as for instance where the landlords, moneylenders, middle-men, etc., are Hindus as in Bengal and the cultivators, borrowers, etc., are Mussalmans. It is a well-known fact that a large part of the grindingly oppressive money-lending in every part of India is done by itinerant Pathan money-lenders. The methods followed by them in realising the interest due, always extravagantly high, both from urban and rural debtors, and I have seen them not only in our towns but also in remote

villages in Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Central Provinces, in the Andhra and Tamil areas as well as in parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujerat, are both summary and drastic. The hatred thus created against them specially where Muslims are in a minority, is illogically extended so as to embrace all Mussalmans.

Naturally, the people, whether Hindu or Muslim, who have been exploited resent and have always resented their position and when, now and again, this hatred breaks out in violence, those interested in keeping up strained feelings immediately try to take advantage of the situation and explain it as a communal riot and thence is drawn the universal conclusion that Hindus and Mussalmans, coming from the same racial stock and, under normal conditions, living at peace and amity with one another, are so radically different in their habits, customs, outlook, culture, and religion that it is impossible for them to live peacefully in one and the same country. This is the unwarranted inductive leap which may be excusable in uneducated, but, certainly not, in the case of educated men. And yet this is what we see round us today in every part of India.

Mass Contact Efforts Explained

All political parties in India have come to recognise the fundamental fact that the day has at last arrived when the peasant has become the real master of the situation. Today political power cannot be acquired without his co-operation. It is therefore that we see attempts at mass contact. We must, however, recognise the radical difference that exists between mass contact due to an unselfish

desire to benefit the masses and the other type the only aim of which is the securing of their votes. The acid test of the disinterested nature of the end in view is to ascertain whether those who seek the support of the masses displayed much concern for them before the political support of the peasantry of India had become such a vital factor in our political life.

Did those people who display such concern for the masses when they solicit their votes, attempt to do anything for them at a time when people thought that, politically speaking, the masses could be neglected with perfect safety? Do these people when once they have acquired power keep up their contact with the masses and have they done, or, are they doing, anything calculated to really benefit them? Or, on the other hand, are these people content with doing spectacular things holding out promises of great benefits for the masses but which, in actual experience, are found to be of little practical utility so far at least as they are concerned?

Honest answers to these and similar queries will clearly show which among the political organisations can lay unchallenged claims to the loyal support of the masses. Tested by standards such as these, both the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha cannot, with justice, maintain that they represent the masses. For they are composed of people belonging to the more educated and prosperous classes whose concern for the masses they claim to represent has not been shown in any except spasmodic and amateurish ways. Today these and other sectional organisations knowing the hollowness of their claims to voice their economic grievances are taking

advantage of the fanaticism or, if we prefer, of the tendency towards fanaticism, of our ignorant brethren and sisters and are making a bid for political power. May one enquire whether with such a record at their back, there is much prospect that, if and when, they attain it, they will use it unselfishly for the benefit of the masses? On the other hand, what proof, except professions of future good intentions, can organisations of this type offer that they have undergone a change of heart and that, in future, they will really work and work hard for the welfare of the masses and among the masses?

I find the leaders of these organisations addressing large gatherings in the towns and cities of India. In other words, their appeal is to the educated intelligentsia. But who is to carry their special message for the masses if they have any for them? Organisations such as these without vital touch with the masses may be compared with the Congress as it was before the entry of Mahatma Gandhi infused new life and fresh vigour into it.

If it is pointed out that very large crowds are in evidence when, now and again, Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha meetings are held in semi-rural or even rural areas, my answer would be that special efforts are responsible for the large attendance and that the deadly monotony of the ordinary life of the peasant, the desire to see new faces and, in fact, the *tamasha* aspect of the meeting combine to bring this about. Here we get a repetition of the working of the same causes which brought together the large crowd in the sunken enclosed garden of Jallianwala in Amritsar of such tragic memory.

I may be mistaken but my firm belief is that these

organisations will be in a position to represent mass Hindu or mass Muslim opinion only when they can throw up leaders like Mahatma Gandhi who has settled down at Sevagram and when they can produce thousands of unselfish workers who have given up worldly ambitions in order to live, work, and die among the rural masses.

Economic Factors And Communalism

It is perfectly true that the miserable condition of the masses has been recognised by all parties. The best proof of this is found in the various legislative measures introduced by popular ministries in both Congress and non-Congress provinces. Principal among these are laws affecting primary education, tenancy rights, and money-lending. More money has been, and is being, spent on what we call nation-building work. I am not concerned just now with any discussion bearing on the relative success of these measures as adopted in various provinces.

To my mind, the recognition of the difficulties under which the masses had been living for generations is due to the championing of their cause by the Congress. This organisation has put heart into the cultivator by methods which all may not approve. But the fact remains that the peasant has now learnt to stand up for his rights and is fully aware of the powers he now enjoys of making himself felt in the legislatures through his elected representatives. It is only too likely that the concessions already granted will whet his appetite for more and the time may not be very distant when he will demand, as a matter of right, what he is now begging as a favour.

What I am concerned with just now is an inquiry as to whether the time is not very near, if it is not here now, when both the Muslim and the Hindu peasant will come to realise that legislative measures enacted for their benefit are enjoyable by both and that though they do not belong to the same religious group, economically their interests are identical. And as in this work-a-day world, the immediate concern of a very large majority among men is the satisfaction of hunger and the removal of nakedness, we have to consider whether the economic aspect of the problem which tends to bring them closer will not ultimately prove stronger than the religious aspect which, let us admit for the sake of argument, tends to drive them asunder. Surely, the recognition of the economic factor which must of necessity grow more and more clear with every day that passes, must have as one of its effects the blurring of the religious factor and must, in the long run, encourage the disappearance of selfishness due to the spirit of communalism.

The Congress And The Disinherited

All the communal organisations which aim at the marshalling of the masses under the leadership of vested interests have been compelled to realise that the Congress is offering disinterested leadership to the masses and that once it is accepted on an all-embracing scale, their position as capitalists will be very greatly jeopardised. In any future reorganisation of India, social or economic, if the "have-nots" come into power, it is the "haves" who must suffer. Other weapons which have been tried have either

broken in their hands or, at best, have achieved only temporary and limited success. The dissemination of the communal spirit through organisations financed and controlled by them seems to show greater promise and this because our masses are illiterate and, as yet, incapable of appreciating the fundamental fact that religion has no place in politics. It is quite possible that this policy may prove successful but not permanently. With the spread of education and increasing economic pressure, the masses, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian, are bound to attain solidarity irrespective of caste and creed and then the knell of communalism will be sounded.

One of the results of such a state of things, no matter how far off the day when it will eventuate, must be to array the disinherited children of India against those who have so long been exploiting them. It was the recognition of this fact which made that well-known Mussalman nationalist, Syed Ataullah Shah Bukhari, observe about four years ago that, fundamentally, there are only two parties in India and these in his view are

the capitalists, which consisted of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Congress, which included the Ahrar Party, the Jamait-ulema-i-Hind, and the Khudai Khitmatgars (Red Shirts).

It is inevitable that the Congress which has always fought and suffered for the "have-nots", if it is to retain its predominant position in our motherland, must give the lead in any scheme of national reconstruction. It may be that in future we shall have non-Congress cabinets in some provinces of India in just the same way as we have them today. But in future, as in the past, in order to maintain themselves in office they, while outwardly condemning the

Congress outlook and the Congress programme, will have to steal its thunder by adopping them in some form or other. All political parties desirous of enjoying power will have to benefit the "have-nots" at the expense of the "haves". And if this happens, as happen it must, the Congress will have the consolation of knowing that though attempts, more or less successful, may be made to discredit it in the eyes of the public, it has achieved its purpose and no individual or organisation can have greater consolation. It will thus have accomplished the stupendous task of destroying communalism root and branch and of bringing together every section and sub-section of India's nationals under one banner for the attainment of common purposes the most important of which is economic and political freedom.

CHAPTER II

THE CONGRESS APPROACH TO SOME INDIAN PROBLEMS

In Britain, where roughly 75 per cent or more live in towns and the rest in the country, the prosperity or otherwise of the British can be judged by an examination of the conditions under which the townsmen live. But in India about 90 per cent of the population live in the country and of the 39 million who, in 1931, lived in urban areas, only about 7 million lived in 30 towns carrying populations of more than one lakh. The further fact that about 71 per cent are engaged in agriculture conclusively proves that our motherland is so predominantly rural, that we can hope to benefit ourselves only by benefiting our rural brethren and sisters.

Every Indian is more or less familiar with the condition of the Indian living in the countryside. Here is an account of the impressions of an American tourist who visited a large village situated about twenty miles from Calcutta. Those who have visited provinces other than Bengal are aware that though this American has described a village of this particular province, his description is equally applicable to any village of India with, of course, necessary modifications due to local conditions.

The village was as stagnant as its square, sunken water tank. Bengali women who came down the steps to kneel and scour with wet earth their brass pots, or to fetch water for cooking, or to wash their clothes or bathe, had first to clear away the green scum in a little circle around themselves. The roads were partly

under water, from the rains of a week before. It did not surprise me to learn later that in many districts of Bengal, the death-rate exceeds the birth-rate, owing to the ravages of malaria. In the whole of this town which comprises four thousand households, there was but one village industry, offering employment to about fifty women and children and a handful of men—a jute-rope factory. The principal toddy-shop was owned by the biggest money-lender. When I was informed that money-lenders not infrequently charged two annas per month for the loan of one rupee thus exacting 150 per cent a year, I understood one reason for the helpless poverty of the masses. Bengal happens to be caught in the clutches of a powerful land-owning class, known as the Zemindars, and few peasants actually own land. They are the tenants of absentee landlords, paying four or five rupees rent per month. But it appeared that, because many of them had no money to buy seed, they had no money to pay rent. In order to keep their mud roofs over their heads, they generally had recourse to the money-lender. Only too often the landlord himself turned money-lender, adding interest month by month to the amount of his tenants' indebtedness, the system resulting in an ever-widening vicious circle.

Presently we came to a little clearing where two mud dwellings stood facing each other. Out in the glaring sun on a dirty blanket, a young man was lying. His eyes were dull with fever. His legs and arms were incredibly thin, mere bores, held in place by a loosely drawn envelope of skin. An old woman with straggling hair fanned the burning sticks laid in a depression in the space between the houses. A glance through the door-ways showed the entire contents of each—a few rags by way of bedding, a brass water jar and an earthen pot. In one of the houses the youngman's father, squatting on his haunches, was shovelling rice into his mouth. He entered into explanation. Yesterday there had been no food because there had been no work. To-day there had been a little work, and consequently they were eating well. To-morrow! well, to-morrow must look to itself. It was not within their power to shape its course. But the boy outside was very bad. They had used up all the medicine that the gentleman had left them when the gentleman came two weeks ago.

On the way back, a loud droning, like bees on a hot afternoon led us to a narrow verandah, where grouped around a young Hindu teacher, the plutocrat urchins of the village were learning to read. All except one, the teacher reported, were paying a rupee a month for their schooling. There they sat with their little legs crossed under them, waving backward and forward, each in his own way, at his own speed chanting in a loud sing-song from a paper-covered book the valorous achievements of some ancient hero, more god than man. Gandhi's name was mentioned. 'Gandhi is a saint!' the young Hindu remarked quietly, The water may stagnate in the pools; the people

may die of malaria, still there is hope that the Zeminder will not press too hard for the unpaid rents. Surely the rich wine merchant or the two bearded Afgans in their strange red clothes who appeared suddenly in the village the other day, offering to lend money, will come to the rescue. If there is no work and no rice to-day, to-morrow will produce both. Or perhaps it will not be necessary to work.

In this extract we find references to the following problems—lack of work, extreme poverty, starvation, nakedness, illiteracy, bad system of land tenure, exactions of money-lenders, prevalence of disease, lack of public health facilities, want of safe drinking water, and, to crown all, state-controlled sale of liquor for purely revenue purposes. Only one fact has not been referred to, namely, the presence of the untouchables and the social tyranny of which they are the victims.

The Problem Of Poverty

An analysis of the Income Tax Returns for 1932-33, throws a flood of light on the economic condition of the country as a whole. It appears that, out of a total population of 272 million in British India, about 564,134 persons or about .002 per cent earned Rs. 1,000/- or more per year; about 271,171 or about .001 per cent earned less than Rs. 2,000 per year while only 355 people in the whole of British India had incomes of one lakh and more.

This shows what a gulf separates India from the more advanced countries, how difficult it is for the majority among us to save any thing for purposes of investment, how uneven the distribution of wealth and how cruelly any tax presses on the financial resources of a majority of Indians. This must lead to the conclusion

that, however great the temptation to increase the revenues of India, it is not at all desirable to tax articles in daily use by the masses. This must rule out taxes on such articles as salt, matches, kerosine oil, tobacco, and the like and yet this is what has been, and is being, done in spite of vigorous protests by the elected representatives of the people.

The general poverty of the masses as proved by the income tax figures is a very cogent argument in favour of the Indianisation of the different branches of the Imperial services as well as of cutting down all but absolutely necessary expenditure on the army. So far as the Imperial services are concerned, we are aware that it is one of the costliest in the world and, as such, has been characterised by a nationalist as "a Rolls Royce administration in a bullock cart country". India has to remit about 9 million sterling every year to meet the pension liabilities of retired European officials. Overseas allowances and passages to England and other special privileges are said to cost the Indian tax-payer the enormous sum of Rs. 2 lakh 15 thousand for each non-Asiatic official who serves in India. It has been stated that the total salary bill of the superior officers for the whole of India is near about 100 crore or over 30 per cent of the total public expenditure and that a graduated reduction in the salaries of these officials ranging from 10 to 50 per cent would easily set free 20 crore annually which could be spent for financing education, sanitation, etc.

It has been shown elsewhere that, taking the total revenue of the Central and Provincial Governments and of

local bodies of British India, the average revenue realised from each soul in 1930-31, was almost Rs. 10/-. As the rate of progress must ultimately depend on the revenues realised, it follows that our present backward state is due to the nominal expenditure we incur on heads which are really concerned with national prosperity. There are only two ways of meeting this situation—one is cutting down expenses where it can be done without sacrificing efficiency and the other is to somehow increase the revenues by finding out new, and, as yet, untapped sources. Situated as we are in India, we have to use both these ways. So far as effecting economies is concerned, probably the easiest method lies in the Indianisation of the Imperial services and the nationalisation of our army.

As for the expenses on defence, it is understood that upto nearly the time of the outbreak of the present war, India spent nearly 42 per cent of her Central revenues on this item while France and Italy spent about 10 per cent and Britain about 14 per cent of their total revenues. This is why the Congress has been pleading for Indianising the army. It has also pressed for increased contributions from the British exchequer to meet a larger part of the expenditure involved in the maintenance of the British regiments stationed in India.

Coming to the question of increasing the revenues, we must remember that if we really want to help our poorer brethren and sisters, this should go hand in hand with abolishing altogether taxes such as the salt tax which press heavily on them. At the same time, heavier taxes will have to be imposed on the wealthier classes for thus only can we finance our nation-building activities. This is the

only method by which we can face the loss of revenue which the introduction of ameliorative measures like Prohibition is likely to entail.

This is why in the Fundamental Rights Resolution passed at the Karachi session of the Congress in 1931, it was laid down that when power came into the hands of the Congress, it would reduce the military expenditure by at least half, giving military training to Indians so that any reduction in the number of professional soldiers would not necessarily imply diminution in India's military strength. Instead of saying that the Imperial services would be Indianised, it stated that, ordinarily, no servant of the State would be paid more than Rs. 500/- per month. In this way, it proposed to decrease the expenditure on administration so as to set more money free for financing nation-building work. In order to give some relief to the extremely poor, it promised to abolish the salt tax. It undertook to shape its currency and exchange policy in order to safeguard the national interest. It also proposed to increase the public revenues by taxing those who can afford to pay by the introduction of the inheritance tax on a graduated scale, by nationalising the key industries and services such as railways, steamer lines, etc.

The Problem Of Hunger

Dr. Radhakamal Mookerjee, Professor and Head of the Department of Economics and Sociology, Lucknow University, and author of numerous books, after making a detailed examination in his *Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions* of statistics bearing on the amount of food

available and the population of India, concludes as follows :—

India has now fallen short of food for 48 millions of her average men, provided that agricultural seasons are normal and droughts and floods do not occur.

These 48 millions, he explains, will undergo complete starvation on the assumption that the rest will "obtain their normal daily ration". What is actually happening, however, is that people are taking less than the normal quantity needed with the result that all are undernourished. With malnutrition as the normal state, it is no wonder that Indians lacking in resistive power fall easy victims to one or other of such epidemics as cholera, small-pox, and plague which are always with us and each of which is responsible for 50,000 to 300,000 deaths every year.

Another fact which needs emphasising is that not a single year passes in which we do not have either too much or too little rain in some part of India or other. Unless the shortage of crops in one part of our motherland is compensated by a bumper harvest in another, the total amount of food available must be below that which has been taken into account as the basis for Dr. Mookherjee's calculation. While it is not contended that there are many occasions in which India, as a whole, cannot maintain her ordinary production, still such years are not quite unknown when the underfed people must of necessity undergo slow starvation. This was recognised by Mr. Purcell, a member of Parliament, who said in 1928, that the "trouble with India is stomach trouble".

It was the Rev. C. H. Macfarlane, a Scotch missionary, and one of the best friends of India who said :

The people in India are living on one meal every two or three days ; the poorer classes are always prepared for this. As one of them said, "If we can eat food once in two days, we will not ask for more".

The grim spectre of starvation stares every poor Indian in the face because, in the language of another Briton, there are in India "two bowls of rice for every three individuals".

In order to help agriculturists as far as possible, the Karachi resolution made it clear that the Congress recognised the right of peasants and workers to form unions to safeguard their interests. It also held out a promise to reform the system of land tenure, land revenue and rent, to exempt uneconomical holdings from payment of rent and revenue, and to reduce the dues payable for the smaller holdings. These measures when implemented would rule out rack-renting whether by the Zemindar or by the State. The peasant organisations would materially check, if not actually stop, the exploitation of the peasantry by those responsible for collecting the rent.

We are all aware of what the different Congress governments did in these directions during the short period they were in office and how gratefully they were hailed by those benefited by these measures.

The Problem Of Clothes

The finding of the League of Nations is that the average amount of clothing *per capita* for the whole world is round about 30 square yards. According to one estimate, the average amount actually consumed *per capita* every year by India is 10 and, according to another, 11 square

yards. This is just enough to provide the average Indian with an ordinary size *dhoti* or *sari* and only one body garment. If pyjamas are used, it would suffice for two of them and one garment for the body. This is clear proof that, as a nation, we are insufficiently clothed and this, in spite of the fact that we grow cotton which we supply not only to the three hundred and more Indian cotton mills but also, till the other day, to the cotton mills of Japan.

It has been held authoritatively that the cotton we produce if hand spun and hand-woven would not only provide part-time work for nearly 7 crores of people working three hours daily but, on top of that, would mean a saving of the many crores which the poorest of the poor have to spend out of their very slender earnings for buying their clothing. At the same time, it would also give them nearly double the amount of clothes they can afford to use today. The only expenditure to which they would be put would be the actual cost of the cotton and that for weaving the thread spun by them. This would provide that spare time and profitable occupation of which the agriculturist of India stands in such sore need today.

In order that our masses may have an adequate supply of clothes, the plan of inducing them to wear the Khadi manufactured by them has been adopted. This is encouraged by paying part of the wages earned for spinning thread in the form of the Khadi. The result is that today in some of the provinces I have visited, I have found the Khaddar produced consumed within the provinces themselves. This is specially true of South India. This self-sufficiency is greatly to be encouraged in a poor country like India.

In order that Khaddar as well as machine-made cloth produced in India may not have to meet unfair competition from machine-made cheap foreign stuff, the Karachi resolution guaranteed "protection of indigenous cloth against competition of foreign cloth". When this can be given effect to, Indian cloth, whether machine-made or hand-woven, will naturally command large sales. So far as competition between hand-spun and hand-woven Khaddar and machine-made cotton stuff produced in India is concerned, it is held that the use of Khaddar by the producers themselves will rule out all possibilities of unhealthy rivalry between them.

The Problem of Indebtedness

The extremely poor man in the urban areas is without any credit and the money-lender who knows how to exploit this class of people has always flourished. In the country side, the cultivator is unable to carry on agricultural operations without the help of capital which he has to borrow from the village money-lender. And so poor people living in both rural and urban areas have been exploited by money-lenders for centuries. This has been rendered comparatively easy because the son has always agreed to be responsible for the debts of his father. The result has been that, in many cases, though interest on the debt has been paid to the extent of even ten or fifteen times the amount originally borrowed, the debtor has still remained responsible for the original sum advanced. It is common for money to be lent at at the rate of two annas in the rupee, compound interest,

per month. It has been calculated that if Rs. 60/- is borrowed under these terms and if nothing is paid either towards interest or capital, in five years the debt increases to Rs. 60,000/-.

To adopt legislative measures which would tend to do away with the money-lenders as a class is not wise till Government is in a position to provide some satisfactory agency to replace them. Recognising this practical difficulty, the Karachi resolution promised "relief of agricultural indebtedness and the control of usury." The former is necessary in order to enable the borrower to repay his debt which will become a possibility only by scaling it down. The control of usury will enable the borrower to obtain loans at reasonable rates of interest. This last step alone is calculated to enable him to repay his debts.

We are all aware that, during the time that the Congress ministries were in power, they introduced and passed legislation to this end in spite of opposition from interested quarters. Probably it is one of those proofs of the concern of the Congress for the masses which the latter can fully appreciate without any kind of difficulty.

The Problem Of Public Health and Sanitation

National India maintains that the British administration has not, in the past, paid adequate attention to those problems of public health and sanitation on the solution of which depends the health and efficiency of the people of

India. It would draw the attention of all to the report of the Public Health Department for 1935, according to which India has the highest birth and death rates as well as the highest infantile mortality per thousand.

The same year, there were about 6,700 hospitals each of which served about 41,000 patients on the average every year. There was one hospital or dispensary for about every 170 square miles. A majority of the dispensaries and hospitals are located in the larger centres of population with the result that extensive areas of rural India are quite uncovered.

Then again, while we do not have a sufficient number of qualified medical men, those available prefer to settle in the larger towns where they have a better chance of working up a lucrative practice. It is admitted that such an attitude proves their lack of concern for the welfare of the rural masses but fairness demands that it should be stated that, till the Congress came into power, nothing special in the way of paying small subsidies to such men was done to induce them to settle in backward areas.

According to the Census of 1881, the average Indian could expect to live 30 years but this had been reduced to less than 24 years in 1931. This is staggering when we remember that, during the half century which intervened between 1881 and 1931, the average expectation of life of other countries has been continuously on the increase.

No wonder that one of the best European friends Bengal had, the late Sir Daniel Hamilton, who founded the agricultural colony at Gosaba near Calcutta, in the course of an

address delivered before a large and exceedingly well-educated audience at the Calcutta University described India as

The minus quantity of the Empire ; minus education, minus doctors and medicine, minus sanitation . . . and minus everything else that make the wheel of life turn smoothly.

Lastly, National India would point out that while Great Britain spends about six rupees per head every year for public health, India spends about three annas per head per year. To put it in a slightly different way, Britain spends about 32 times more per head than India. Surely this could not be expected to lead to any appreciable improvement in the public health of India.

In view of these facts, India feels aggrieved when it remembers that, within the last sixty years, the expenditure on the army has been quadrupled and that the Imperial services have remained too expensive for a poor country like ours. This explains India's insistent demand for the nationalisation of her army and the Indianisation of the Imperial services.

As soon as the Congress ministers, all of whom belong to the middle class and are in constant touch with the masses, came into power, they introduced various measures for improving the public health and sanitation services in the provinces they were administering. With the limited resources at their command, they tried every means to remove the most glaring of these defects thus clearly proving their love for our less fortunate brethren. Their activities in this, as in other, directions were necessarily conditioned by the limited resources at their command.

The Problem Of Illiteracy

Dr. N. N. Ganguly, formerly Professor of Agriculture, Calcutta University, and a member of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture, in his book entitled *Problems of Rural India* has said that

The average cereal crop-yield for the whole of India is about eleven bushels an acre, while England produces thirty, France thirty-three, Denmark forty-one bushels.

Continuing he says,

Fertility of soil is largely a matter of treatment and insufficient produce is partially due to the neglect of scientific agriculture.

There can be no doubt that the principal obstacle to the adoption of improved agricultural methods lies in the illiteracy of our masses.

The seriousness of this defect in our economic organisation was realised more than a century ago by Lord Bentinck who is reported to have said,

It is impossible not to deplore the same defective state in the agricultural, as in every other science in this country. Look where you will—poverty, inferiority, degradation in every shape. For all these evils, knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, is the universal cure.

It cannot be said that there has been any very marked improvement in our condition in the century which has intervened between Bentinck's days and ours for, while every one admits that the cultivator is the backbone of our economic structure, no strenuous efforts were put forth in the past to help him though everyone was aware that it was his appalling illiteracy which was responsible for the backwardness of our chief occupation, agriculture, as well

as for poverty, disease, and degradation. We were always told that Government had no money to spare for the education of the masses.

In 1931, the percentage of literacy in India as a whole was 8.1. Before the revolution, the percentage of literacy in Russia was 17 and, within these few years, it has gone up to more than 90 per cent. Our condition is so backward because, in the past, we spent Re. 1/- per head per year on education. When we contrast with this the fact that, during recent years, Soviet Russia spent Rs. 158/- per head per year on education, we know the secret of the rapid progress made. In the last 20 years, illiteracy has diminished in India to the extent of 3 per cent only. There are no schools in two-thirds of the 7 lakh villages we have in India while we have 21 agricultural colleges with less than 1,500 students in a country where more than 70 per cent of the population live by agriculture. This illiteracy is probably the most serious charge that can be brought against the British administration after its rule of more than 150 years.

Realising the important part literacy must play in the future economic and political development of India, the Indian National Congress in the famous Karachi resolution stated that it stood for "free compulsory primary education" for all.

As soon as the Congress came into power in the different provinces, it began rural uplift work, made arrangements for teaching cottage industries and, best of all, for primary education for children. With the help of the public, it also started adult literacy campaigns. All these merely prove the concern of our only national All-

India organisation for the masses—irrespective of the religious faith professed.

The Problem Of Untouchability

One of the greatest blots on India is the presence in our midst of a population of approximately sixty million souls who, by immemorial social and religious sanctions, are denied the elementary rights of human beings. The first effective action for their social uplift was taken by Christian missionaries who laboured among them converting large numbers to Christianity with a wonderful change for the better among the converts. The Arya Samaj which did not relish the numerical loss suffered by Hindu society, and also probably because the hearts of its leaders had been touched and their conscience roused by the appreciation of their sufferings, commenced admitting them into membership after they had undergone *shuddhi*. From the early years of the twentieth century, Western educated and liberal-minded Hindu philanthropists, imbued with ideals of social service derived from the West, organised Depressed Classes Missions for their educational and economic improvement.

The extension of franchise under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms conferred a new importance on the untouchables as voters and they began to be counted by politicians of the higher castes. The conversion of outcastes in the North-West to Islam, and their mass conversions to Christianity in the South caused alarm. There also appeared the feeling that the treatment of untouchables was a national disgrace and that its removal was

essential if India desired recognition as a civilised and progressive country. It was also felt that this work should no longer be left to foreigners the best proof of which lies in the laws passed in different provinces, always on the initiative of Indian members, affirming their right to equality of treatment in such matters as access to roads, markets, wells, admission to schools, etc.

Such measures, however, affected their public, not their religious, disabilities such as non-admission to temples, and social bars such as exclusion from having food in cafes, restaurants, hotels, etc., patronised by caste Hindus. The *Harijans* realising their strength and, at last, openly resenting their treatment, commenced to organise associations and to hold conferences in which demands were entered for the removal of their disabilities and the improvement of their social and economic status. Nor were they always content with passing resolutions or with pointing out the duty Hindu society owed to them. Where the sense of injustice was keen and the leadership sufficiently courageous, they became militant as at Vaikom, a small town in an Indian State in South India, where, after a non-violent struggle lasting, it is said, for sixteen months, the right of entry into the local temple was wrested from the hither-to unsympathetic State authorities.

The palm of honour must, however, go to Mahatma Gandhi who took the problem of untouchability more seriously than any other All-India leader going further than any one else in his efforts to solve it. Mr. L. S. S. O'Malley, editor of *Modern India* published late in 1941, in his contribution to it entitled "The Hindu Social

System" has referred to Gandhiji's services in this particular sphere in the following terms,

There was no real awakening of public opinion in favour of the movement (for the removal of untouchability) until Mr. Gandhi galvanized it by showing his readiness to fast to death, first in 1932 in order to secure the adequate political representation of the untouchables, and next in 1933 to rouse his countrymen to a sense of the injustice of their treatment.

As regards the practical effects of these measures, in addition to the increase in their political importance, Mr. O' Malley said that,

The untouchables were admitted to temples in a number of places in British India; Travancore and some other States issued proclamations throwing them open to all castes. There was a reorientation of thought in the Hindu community. The more liberal-minded ceased to regard the untouchables as lesser breeds without the law, and there was no longer an atmosphere of uncompromising hostility and intolerance.

Some reference has been made elsewhere in this book to the undertakings given by the Congress in its 1937 election manifesto in regard to the improvements it proposed to make in the treatment of untouchables, due no doubt to the inspiration derived from Mahatma Gandhi. In fulfilment of this guarantee, when the Congress assumed office in Madras where the problem is most acute, it passed the Civil Disabilities Removal Act which provides that,

No untouchable shall, by reason merely of his being such, be prevented or disabled from holding a public appointment, having access to any public stream, river, well, tank, pathway, sanitary convenience, or means of transport, or any secular institution which the general public have right to enjoy or have access to.

The main provisions of the Malabar Temple Entry Act also passed by the Congress Government of Madras are,

that in Malabar, fifty persons in any particular area are entitled to make a requisition to the trustees of a temple to take a referendum on the question of opening it to the untouchables, and that a trustee can take the initiative himself and allow their entry unless objections are raised by fifty residents, in which case, a referendum has to be made. It is significant that this measure was passed with only two Hindu dissentients in a house consisting of 215 members. Another equally noteworthy fact is that one of the most famous shrines in Tanjore as well as some ninety other temples were thrown open to untouchables by a proclamation issued in July, 1939, by their hereditary trustee, the senior prince of Tanjore, without the slightest hint of pressure from any quarter.

The example set by Madras was followed by the Congress Government of Bombay which promoted a measure making it possible for reformers to initiate action leading to the opening of temples to untouchables. And there seems little doubt that if the Congress had not vacated office, the ministries would have introduced similar measures in all Congress provinces. In this connection, attention may also be drawn to the work of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, operating on an All-India basis, most of whose active agents are Congressmen as also to the fact that this organisation invariably received more official encouragement during the time that the Congress was in power than it had done either before or after the Congress had given up office.

Resentmen Against Congress

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the Provincial Governments have to rely for their finances on certain items of taxation. I have carefully examined them and find that the only item capable of expansion on anything like a respectable scale is the revenue derived from excise. But the Congress, with its eyes open, accepted and carried out Prohibition and, with every year that passed, the dry area increased and the revenue from this source fell. This loss in revenue in every Congress province went hand in hand with rapid expansion in nation-building work. The last naturally entailed a great increase in the expenditure.

Let it be admitted with shame and humiliation that the most serious charge brought against us in the past and which cannot be disposed of easily is that, as individuals, we are characterised by the spirit of selfishness. We have invariably placed our individual interests, or, at least, the interests of the particular social or religious group to which we belong, above the interests of the Indian nation as a whole. It is this spirit of selfishness which is to-day responsible for conflict between the two largest communities of India and which has manifested itself in the shape of communalism. What the Congress was and is attempting to achieve is the benefit of the Indian citizen no matter what religion he professes. Where there is an attempt to banish illiteracy, to provide medical aid and safe drinking water, to reduce rent, or to improve the lot of the cultivator or the industrial

labourer, the Congress makes no distinction between Hindu and Muslim, between Sikh and Christian, or between Parsi and Buddhist. Ameliorative measures for the uplift of the *Harijans* the aboriginal inhabitants, and members of the Hill tribes were taken in hand not only for the immediate advantage of the peoples concerned but also for the ultimate good of India as a whole for, after all, the position of India will be determined by the condition of not the most, but the least, progressive of her sons in just the same way as the strength of a chain is determined by the weakest of its links.

The determination of the Congress to improve the condition of the masses irrespective of caste and creed, by carrying out its undertakings, compelled it to seriously consider the question of providing the necessary finances. It realised immediately that the enforcement of Prohibition, a matter dealt with elsewhere, to which it was pledged, and the extension of nation-building activities would have the two-fold effect of reducing the revenue and increasing the expenditure and the different Congress Governments were compelled to impose taxes to balance their budgets.

As patriots who loved the masses and who were aware that the prosperity of our motherland depends not on the enjoyment of riches and the luxuries of life by the few rich but on the abolition of starvation, nakedness, disease, and ignorance of the many, our brethren to whom we ourselves had entrusted the task of saving us from these difficulties, decided, and I hold, decided wisely, that the new taxes devised by them should fall on the shoulders.

of the well-to-do who are best able to bear them. Many genuine Congressmen who are blessed with the good things of life had to pay these new taxes. They did not object because they are patriots and, as such, are aware that the surest and the most satisfactory proof a man can offer to demonstrate his fraternal feelings for his poorer countrymen consists not in words but in deeds, not in sympathy finding expression in empty protestations but in that type of fellow-feeling which shows itself by the sacrifice of personal interests.

But every rich man is not a Congressman or a patriot, and the consequence was that these latter people offered bitter opposition against the introduction of the new taxes. While the real reason for this attitude was undoubtedly selfishness and the desire to retain as much wealth as possible, the excuses put forward for condemning them were given an altogether different complexion. We could understand if the opposition to fresh taxation had come from non-Indians for we are aware that they have come to India as businessmen and it would be only natural for them to resent any measure calculated to diminish their profits. It, however, hurts us terribly when the opposition comes from our own flesh and blood who might very naturally be expected to feel some pity for our unhappy, under-privileged, and unfortunate brothers and sisters.

That the new taxes were imposed in spite of strenuous opposition merely proves that our leaders were sufficiently courageous to do what they considered best in the interests of the country as a whole. If we regard ourselves as Indians

in the real sense of the word, it is our duty to give them credit for what they did for the amelioration of the condition of the masses. It is therefore that the Indian National Congress which sets the interests of the country above the interests of particular sects, groups, and individuals, claims the loyalty of every unselfish and patriotic Indian.

The Nationalist Approach Of The Congress

An Englishman, a friend of mine, who has known Indians intimately for years, said on one occasion that the demand of India is not for votes but for bread, which is perfectly true. Some of us may demand Complete Independence and others would be content with Dominion Status but, at the back of every such demand, is the economic urge. And the Congress swept the polls in the last elections because it embodied India's demand for better standards of living for the masses. It has been said that Surendra Nath Banerjee founded the Congress, that Dadabhai Naoroji gave it the ideal of Swaraj, and that Mahatma Gandhi brought the masses into the Congress. But Gandhiji is the national leader that he actually is because he is, so to say, the *avatar*, the personification, of this idea hitherto unknown to, or, may be, unrecognised by, India, the idea namely of economic and social justice to all including the poorest of the poor. So long as Gandhiji fights social and economic unfairness, so long as he pleads for justice towards the under-privileged and the down-trodden, and so long as the Congress champions their cause, there can be no doubt that both Gandhiji and the

Congress will continue to represent India's views, to enjoy India's confidence, and to wield the political influence and power entrusted to them by India's millions. It may be that not all of us can support the political programme of the Congress, but there cannot be any doubt that every Indian who loves his motherland and her children, must fully co-operate with the Congress so far as the implementing of its economic programme is concerned. To stand aside in such a matter would be to stamp ourselves as selfish exploiters desirous of enjoying special rights and special privileges at the expense of our poorer brothers and sisters and such a charge I feel perfectly sure no Indian would do anything to merit.

CHAPTER III

THE AGRARIAN PROGRAMME OF THE CONGRESS

Sixty years ago, the Indian National Congress commenced voicing the political aspirations of the people. At that time, "people" meant the members of the upper middle class whose demand was more or less confined to what we call "services" and "seats". But there was not enough of these to satisfy all claimants specially when these came to include the lower middle class. Under pressure from the latter, people began talking vaguely about Swaraj. By 1920, when the lower middle class had come into power in the Congress, Swaraj began to be accepted as the goal of our national aspirations. There were many who no longer felt any satisfaction by the mere passing of pious resolutions, more or less ignored by the British administration, and the entry into the Congress of the lower middle class very soon converted it into a militant organisation. It was felt very soon by one section of the Congress that the wants of the common people could not be satisfied till there was some kind of change in the social order and that this change would not come unless and until there was a change in the political order.

In this connection it has to be remembered that the census for 1931 had shown that 90 per cent of the population was, at that time, living in the 7 lakh villages of India. In other words, 318 out of a total of about 352 million were either directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. As for the 10 per cent which lived in towns, it is correct to assume that, on the whole, their prosperity was largely conditioned by the economic position of the people living in the countryside. The rural population has always been desperately poor and when the last elections were held under the Government of India Act, 1935, the number of voters for British India was increased from about 7 to about 36 million.

The common people among whom the revolutionary urge is stronger than among any other class probably because they have nothing to lose in any sudden change but some prospect of bettering their economic condition, learnt to use their franchise to send to the different provincial legislatures men who they thought would press for recognition of their claims to better treatment specially in the economic sphere. They refused to believe that any radical or spectacular change for the better in their condition could be expected from Indians belonging to those political parties which had formerly sent their men either to the legislatures or to office.

It was under these circumstances that these voters in their lakhs were approached by the Congress through its representatives. I propose to give, in a very general way, the reasons which impelled the masses to lend their support to the Congress.

Rack-Rent

Formerly, we had some kind of self-sufficiency specially in our rural areas. If our stand and of living was not high, if we did not consume articles of luxury, all had sufficient food and, unless during famines, people did not succumb to the effects of starvation, complete or partial. When Britain appeared on the scene, we began using the cheap articles made in her factories. This not only reduced our purchasing power but drove our village artisans and handicraftsmen out of business. These took to agriculture as a means of earning their living. Then again, the large additions to our population, which had no other way open to earn its living, increased the demand for land.

Zemindars were not slow to take advantage of the intense competition for land and, little by little, the rent of land was increased to exorbitant amounts. The rent of land directly under the control of Government also went up for it is administered by subordinate officials who are desirous of proving their efficiency by an increase in the revenue and such people never hesitate to put up the rent if they can manage to do so without losing the tenant.

From what has been said repeatedly by Indian economists, it is abundantly clear that, after meeting the legitimate expenses of cultivation, it is impossible for the agriculturist to feed himself and his family properly not to speak of his meeting his financial obligations towards either the owner of the land he cultivates or his financier,

the money-lender. I have known tenants beaten and their women folk insulted both by the agents of landlords and by the subordinates of the revenue department in order to realise arrears of rent and also to extract extra-legal gratifications. It is also known that, in some parts of India, peasants, specially when they are *Harijan* and cultivate land on the crop-sharing basis, are treated as feudal or semi-feudal dependents.

Starvation

The census reports reveal the progressive deterioration of the economic situation of India and, as the majority live in villages, it follows inevitably that this insidious sapping of the economic foundations of our social organisation is applicable very largely, if not almost exclusively, to our rural brethren. Thus in the census of 1911, we are told that the percentage of persons "gainfully employed" was 47; in 1921, it was 46 and in 1931, 44. This is ample testimony that our capacity to produce wealth is diminishing and, with it, starvation is increasing progressively.

The population of India is increasing to the extent of about 50 million every ten years but there has not been a corresponding increase in the amount of food available. In a recent book specially devoted to the investigation of the food problem entitled *Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions*, Dr. Radha Kamal Mookherjee, Professor of Economics, Lucknow University, has proved that

India has now fallen short of food for 48 millions of her average men, provided that agricultural seasons are normal and droughts and floods do not occur.

But natural calamities do occur in some part of India or other when the number of the starving must naturally be higher. Another fact which should be borne in mind is that it is not correct to assume that these half a crore people starve every day of their lives for, in that case, they would die of sheer starvation and the problem of food shortage would automatically solve itself. What really happens is that the food available is shared with others with the result that nearly all the poor are semi-starved.

This is proved by what Sir John Megaw who retired as Surgeon-General of India said only the other day. His opinion is that only 39 per cent of the population of India are well-nourished, leaving 61 per cent insufficiently nourished.

The views quoted above have been given by experts. But the prevailing state of semi-starvation has attracted the attention of all observers. It is not an Indian but a European who said that in India there are two bowls of rice for every three souls. Another observer, this time an Englishman, Sir Charles Elliot, said, -

I do not hesitate to say that half the agricultural population of India never know from year's end to year's end what it is to have their hunger satisfied.

Occasionally, the position is even worse as is evident from a statement made by the Rev. C. H. McFarlane.

People in India are living on one meal every two or three days. The poorer classes are always prepared for this. As one of them said, "If we can eat food once in two days, we will not ask for more."

This food shortage is due to the low productivity of

of our land for, according to Prof. Ganguly of the Department of Agriculture, Calcutta University,

The average cereal crop-yield all over India comes up to about eleven bushels an acre, while England produces thirty, France thirty-three and Denmark forty-one bushels.

This low productivity is due to the unscientific way in which the land is cultivated and which is due to want of education. Another important factor is the immense pressure on land on account of the very large numbers who depend on agriculture for their support. The result is that the Indian agriculturist has to maintain himself on such a meagre area of land that its produce is quite insufficient to provide him and his family with an adequate amount of food. The smallness of the average area cultivated in India may be inferred from the fact that, while the Canadian farmer cultivates 140, the British farmer 26, and the Japanese farmer, in spite of the smallness of his country, $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres, the average area under cultivation of every Indian who lives on agriculture is 1.2 acres only.

Nakedness

After the proof which has been offered regarding the state of destitution of rural India which is responsible for slow starvation, it is not perhaps necessary to state that the appalling poverty of our brothers and sisters makes it impossible for them to supply themselves with an adequate quantity of clothing. Let us hear what Englishmen have to say on this matter. William Crooke, so well-

known for the very valuable work he has done for us, speaking of his experience in North India says,

As to clothes, the women and children are much worse off than the men. It is unusual to find a village woman who has any wraps at all. Most of them have to pass the night as best they can in their day-clothes—a cotton petticoat, wrapper and bodice. As a rule, they and their children sleep in the cold weather, during the warm afternoons and early hours of the night, and from midnight to dawn cower over a fire of rubbish in the yard of the dwelling house.

Rev. John Hoyland who spent many years in the Central Provinces says I have

visited thousands of Indian homes, where the only household possessions were a few brass-cooking vessels, a string-cot and a few rags. Such people, if asked where is their bedding, will point to a pile of sticks and say 'that is our bedding' meaning that on cold nights they cower over a wood-fire.

Indebtedness

Let me quote here the story of one Haran Mondal, a Bengali agriculturist who, at one time, was the headman of his village. He made the following statement to the District Magistrate of Dacca in East Bengal :—

I owned a large holding of some twenty acres. Twelve years back I had to borrow the small sum of Rs. 25/- on the occasion of my son's marriage. After three years having repaid neither capital nor interest, I was asked to execute a fresh bond for Rs. 50/-, which I gladly did. After the lapse of another three years, my creditor demanded repayment, or in lieu thereof, the cession to him of one acre of land. I refused to part with my land and borrowed from another man the sum of Rs. 100/- to repay the loan. This amount being less by Rs. 12/8/- than the principal and interest due, was refused by the money-lender. Just about this time, my uncle died, and to perform the Sradh ceremony, I had to spend the whole amount. The result is that my debts now exceed Rs. 500/-, the 12 years' growth of a loan of Rs. 25.

The case of Haran Mondal is a typical one and it explains how the cultivator is being exploited in every part of India. The peasant would gladly repay his debt but he cannot do so through sheer inability. I may refer to the situation in the Madras Presidency to prove the correctness of my views. In 1895, Sir John Nicholson estimated the debt of the agriculturists of this province at 45 crores. The estimate of the Banking Enquiry Committee in 1930, was Rs. 150 crores. An I.C.S. officer was specially deputed to conduct an inquiry into this matter and his estimate of the debt of the peasantry of the Madras Presidency in 1938, was Rs. 200 crores. The majority report of the Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee explains this rise in the debt as being due to the compounding of interest and to the custom of children taking on the debts of their fathers even when they do not inherit any property coupled with poverty due to insufficiency of work.

These facts have been referred to for the purpose of making it absolutely clear that the rural population of India is head over ears in debt and that the burden of indebtedness has grown so heavy that it spells their absolute ruin if relief is not immediately given. It may be that, in the past, the peasantry ran into debt for celebrating marriages with a certain amount of extravagance and for similar other unproductive purposes, but this is not generally the case now. Today, debts are generally incurred to provide food during those months when no work can be had, to buy a piece of cloth to cover the nakedness of a mother, a wife or a daughter, to arrange a funeral or to

save the little land a cultivator owns from being auctioned for unpaid rent. With the disastrous fall in the price of agricultural products, the cultivator finds it impossible to pay his dues and to feed himself and the members of his family.

When, therefore, the Zemindar or the money-lender attaches his property and when no one advances him a loan, he becomes a landless agricultural labourer and his miseries increase beyond all conception. How true is the picture drawn is evident from the fact that in 1931, 70 million out of a total of 103 million actually engaged in cultivation did not own the land they cultivated. The desperate state to which such men are reduced makes them an easy prey to socialistic and communistic propaganda and this is a menace with which India is confronted to-day.

I have also been told that, in some parts of India, when a *Harijan* needs money and has no security to offer, he pledges his services for repayment of the amount borrowed. He then works for his creditor and receives in return his food but no cash which would enable him to repay the principal. He is thus doomed to what one may well regard as practical slavery. Sometimes, the services of children are pledged in a similar way and thus a condition of abject serfdom is set up from which there is no escape. No wonder people treated in this shameful way entertain an undying hatred for those guilty of such conduct towards them and it should not cause any surprise if they provide a fertile soil for the propagation of communistic ideas.

Unemployment

The percentage of population dependent on agriculture has, for some years past, been rising steadily. Thus we find that the percentage which was 61 in 1891, became 66 in 1901, 71 in 1911, and 73 in 1921. This has happened because of the disappearance of those industries which supported our village artisans and handicraftsmen and also because the increase in the population has not been accompanied by any corresponding increase in the number of openings available for earning a living.

It is, therefore, evident that if there is an extensive failure of crops which happens now and then, India's millions are faced with what practically amounts to famine conditions. Cottage industries practised on sufficiently large scale should be a second string to their bow and that is why they should be encouraged.

Then again, it has been said by more than one authority that, on the whole, agricultural operations cannot keep a man engaged for more than six months in the year. And yet, he and his dependents must earn their food for all the twelve months. It is here that cottage industries are useful for providing him and, in many cases, the members of his family, with remunerative work. We are told by an expert of such eminence as Sir M. Visvesvaraya that, in spite of the decadent state of the cottage industries of India, large scale industries produced Rs. 140 and these Rs. 262 crore worth of goods.

Cottage industries, if properly organised, can utilise locally produced raw materials thus enabling their producers

to obtain remunerative prices and to escape exploitation by middle men. Similarly, if the products of the cottage industries meet local needs, those engaged in these industries are not compelled to rely on middle men to sell their manufactures who, in the process, manage to deprive them of a fairly large share of their profits.

All these had come under the notice of the national leaders and it was, therefore, that their concern for the welfare of the masses led the Congress to not only encourage large scale industries carried on with the help of machinery but also cottage industries which can be followed at home with the assistance of very simple and cheap implements. In the old days, India produced artistic specimens of various cottage industries which commanded ready sale among rich and well-to-do Indians and non-Indians. Gandhiji, however, realised that if it is desired to provide remunerative work for the masses, it is absolutely essential that they should be taught to produce articles of daily consumption by ordinary men and even by the poor. Naturally, these would be concerned with the two primary needs of food and clothing. In view of the shameless way in which both manufacturers and middlemen adulterate foodstuff such as flour, rice, mustard and jinjili oil, *ghae*, *gur*, etc., it is equally necessary to do something to ensure a continuous supply to the public of these articles in their unadulterated state. After food would come home-made clothing, that is Khaddar. Lastly, in view of the extreme poverty of India, it is necessary that nothing should be wasted but that, on the other hand, every

available thing should be utilised to the fullest possible extent.

All these factors taken together are responsible for the Khaddar spinning and weaving programme and for the activities of the All-India Village Industries Association. It has been calculated that if Khaddar is rendered sufficiently popular, it will give part-time employment to about 90 million and full-time employment to about 45 million. The daily earnings of these people at standard rates will be about Rs. 84 lakhs. So far as the work of the All-India Village Industries Association is concerned, we are all aware that, in every centre in which it is working, we can procure hand-pounded rice, whole meal *atta*, pure oil, *ghee*, honey, hand-made paper, etc. We also know that this organisation is utilising the carcasses of animals not only for the manufacture of high class leather but also for bone-meal, manure, etc.

Very great encouragement was given to industries in general and, to cottage industries in particular, by the different Congress Governments when they were in office. While it is perfectly true that there is no specific mention of cottage industries in the Fundamental Rights Resolution passed at Karachi in 1931, except indirectly by the undertaking to give protection to indigenous cloth, it is nonetheless a fact that this policy is the natural outcome of the uniformly friendly attitude of the Congress towards the common people.

Illiteracy

The attainment of literacy by our agriculturists is not only necessary for making the adoption of improved agricultural methods acceptable, for saving them from exploitation by the landlord, the petty Government official, and the moneylender but also to make them fit to take their part in all those activities with which the well-being of the countryside is bound up. Lastly, literacy is necessary so that they might follow politics and learn to use their franchise wisely. Let us now try to find out to what extent we have approached this ideal.

It was in 1904, that the Government of India made the following pronouncement :

On a general view of the question, the Government of India cannot avoid the conclusion that primary education has hitherto received insufficient attention and an inadequate share of the public funds. They consider that it possesses a strong claim upon sympathy both of the Supreme Government and the Local Governments, and should be made a leading charge upon the provincial revenue, and that in those provinces where it is in a backward condition, its encouragement should be a primary obligation.

That the resolution was not carried out zealously is evident from the fact that literacy rose in India in the 50 years between 1881 and 1931, from 3·5 per cent to 9·0 per cent recording roughly a rise of 1 per cent for every ten years. In these figures, the percentages of India and Burma are taken together. But Burma has now gone out and, if we exclude its contribution, we shall find that in 1931, the percentage of literacy for India only was 6·9.

It is probably needless to say that if we progress at

the rate we have been doing for the last half a century or even if we accelerate the rate to some extent, centuries will have to pass before India will be able to claim a fairly satisfactory percentage of literacy or to help the peasantry in the ways outlined above.

Implications Of The Agrarian Programme

To people undergoing the difficulties to which reference has been made, the Agrarian Programme of the Congress accepted at the Lucknow Sessions in 1936, was something the value of which they could fully appreciate. To refer to the difficulties of the peasantry one by one, so far as rack-renting whether on the part of the State or the Zemindar is concerned, the Congress promised

a substantial reduction in respect of rent and revenue demands.

The Congress was aware that, in many cases, the Zemindars, specially when they are local men, take advantage of their position to exploit their ignorant tenants. With a view to putting an end to this very objectionable state of affairs, it promised to take special steps to safeguard

the interests of peasants where there are intermediaries between the State and themselves.

In order to remove, once for all, the oppression of the cultivator by the landlord, it said that the Congress when it came into power would take steps to bring about

the emancipation of peasants from feudal and semi-feudal levies.

To prevent the harassing of ignorant agriculturists who have not as yet learnt to stand up for their legitimate rights, the Congress guaranteed

freedom from oppression and harassment at the hands of Government officials and landlords.

Recognising the fact that till new and large areas of land now lying fallow are brought under cultivation, it is impossible to increase the size of agricultural holdings, the Congress took the very practical step of laying down the policy that, under its regime, the peasantry would, under certain conditions, be allowed to utilise the products of forests, of rivers, etc., to eke out their small earnings from agriculture. It therefore guaranteed the cultivator

protection against harassing restrictions on utilisation of local natural facilities for their domestic and agricultural needs.

Not only Mahatma Gandhi but the other great leaders of the Congress had mixed with the masses in the course of their political activities. Many of them had lived cheek by jowl with poor Congressmen belonging to the masses specially when non-co-operators, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, had been thrust into jails. They are familiar with the starvation and the nakedness which are the portion of our rural brethren and sisters. They are also equally familiar with the tales of woe poured into their sympathetic ears by thousands of Congressmen and Congresswomen who have to lead subnormal lives due to poverty caused by lack of employment. They, like most of us, must have heard many a story illustrating the rapacity of the bloodsucking money-lender and the cruel Zemindar. It is therefore that

Mahatma Gandhi took the initiative in starting the All-India Spinners' Association and the All-India Village Industries Association. Both these organisations are meant to provide work for the workless in the rural areas.

In the Agrarian Programme accepted at the Lucknow Sessions in 1936, all the difficulties mentioned above have been anticipated by an assurance being given with regard to

just and fair relief of agricultural indebtedness including arrears of rent and revenue.

Similarly, a promise has been held out about fostering industries for relieving rural unemployment.

A third guarantee calculated to raise the intellectual and ethical standards of our rural brothers and sister is to the effect that there would be

a just allotment of State expenditure for social, economic and cultural amenities of villages.

Special provision is made for the abolition of illiteracy in the Fundamental Rights Resolution of the Karachi Congress where it is definitely laid down that arrangements would be made for "free compulsory primary education."

But what I regard as the best and the most promising of these assurances is the one to which the first place was given and which says that under Congress there would be

freedom of organisation of agricultural labourers and peasants,

This I regard as the most precious of all because, after everything is said and done, each social and religious group, like each individual, will have to work out its own

salvation. By allowing the cultivators to organise themselves so as to be in a position to make their demands with one voice, the Congress proved itself the democratic body it really is. It knows that, at the beginning, it is more than likely that Kishan organisations might easily be led to accept a radically leftist programme but it has sufficient vision to recognise the fact that our peasants must learn wisdom by making and rectifying their own mistakes. And it has that abiding faith in the fundamental goodness of their heart which has enabled the Congress to promise a right which, at least in some countries in the West, is still denied to labour whether agricultural or industrial.

Political Response To The Programme

In a message dated the 12th February, 1937, sent to the Congressmen of the United Province from remote Karnatak, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru after referring to the wonderful success achieved in the Provincial elections which had just ended, said that it had been secured neither by the candidates in their individual capacities or by the Congress workers who had toiled for it, but by the Congress organisation which had put hope into the dull hearts of the suffering millions of India. Even more than the triumph of the Congress, it was, in his language,

the masses themselves who had triumphed despite all the pressure and threats and violence and inducements that were offered to them.

In explaining what had brought the villagers marching from long distances to the polling booths with the Congress

flag leading them and voting *en bloc* for the candidates put up by the Congress, Jawaharlal expressed the view that

the masses voted for the Congress because they felt that the Congress stood for their interests, worked for them, and was their true representative.

The lesson of the election (all over India) is that wherever we have gone straight to the masses and spoken the clear and simple language that they understand, they have gladly and whole-heartedly thrown their weight in our favour.

That the above views were not hasty ones called into being by the jubilation natural under the circumstances, and that the estimate, formed after the first flush of victory was over, confirmed it is clear from the pamphlet entitled *Congress and Elections* written by Dr. Ashraff. In it occurs the following passage which clearly proves that it was the adoption of a constructive economic programme which had won the support of the masses and those who sympathised with them.

Our experience of the election campaign proves once again that the peasantry, the industrial workers, the lower middle classes in general are the mainstay of our struggle in the country. We have uniformly won with big majorities wherever we clearly emphasised the economic demands of the exploited masses of our countrymen and asked them to prepare for mass struggle. Our decisive victories in the various provinces are almost entirely due to the overwhelming support of peasants and petty land-holders on the basis of our Agrarian Programme, and the Fundamental Rights incorporated in the Karachi Congress Resolution. Our victories in those parts of the country where official repression was the most severe gives a direct lie to those who usually talk of a state of defeatism and political backwardness among the masses. The big landlords, the feudal aristocracy invariably went against us and declared their hostility in no uncertain terms.

After this weighty evidence coming from official Congress quarters, there is no necessity to emphasise further the fact that the acceptance of the Agrarian Programme by the Congress did have a great deal to do with

the support it received from the peasantry and also that the Congress may claim with justice to represent the views of the masses.

Execution Of The Programme

Probably no one will deny that the Agrarian Programme of the Congress which won for it the political support of the rural folk is the direct result of the inspiration received from Mahatma Gandhi though, at the same time, it is also equally correct to suggest that Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru is as vitally interested in the welfare of the masses, including the peasantry, as our great leader—a fact easily proved by even the most cursory study of his *Autobiography*. With these two leaders advocating the cause of the rural masses which constitute from 80 to 90 per cent of our total population, it was but natural that the first general social legislation undertaken by the Congress ministries should aim at the removal of some at least of their gravest disabilities.

The experience I have gathered during my All-India tours which began in 1938, in the course of which it was my privilege to enjoy the hospitality of not only the rich but even of the poorest of the poor, including actual cultivators of the soil, in every British Indian province except Sind and the North-West Frontier and in nearly thirty large and small Indian States, has shown me that the most serious evils suffered by the peasantry are excessive rent with its consequence heavy indebtedness. While extravagance is, in many cases, one of the causes of debt,

there is nothing to prove that it is the only cause. From what I have found after personal contact with actual cultivators all over the areas visited by me and these, I may add, belonged to all religions, I believe that I am justified in holding that, in most parts of British and Indian India, the indebtedness of the peasantry has greatly increased after the world depression and the catastrophic fall in the prices of agricultural products round about 1932. This rural indebtedness of India which, according to the Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee, amounted, in 1929, to no less a sum than 900 crores, increased still further in later years as is proved by what appears on page 176 of the first volume of *Economic Problems of Modern India* where it is said that

If the total agricultural debt of British India was about Rs. 900 crores in 1928-29, it must have increased to about 1,200 crores by 1933, and the real burden must be tantamount to Rs. 2,200 crores assuming fall in price by 50 per cent between 1929 and 1933.

The amount referred to just now was owed by the rural folk mainly to their landlords and money-lenders. Where they are direct tenants of Government and have therefore to clear their rent or quit the land, what actually happens when money is short, is a visit to the *Mahajan* for the necessary finances. This indirectly means the piling up of further debts due to their inability to pay the exorbitant rates of interest almost universally charged. The different Congress Governments had to face three difficulties in their attempt to benefit the cultivating classes. The first of these was to scale down existing debts so as to make repayment of their

obligations a possibility for the rural poor, the second, to restrict the exactions of money-lenders, and, the third, to improve the conditions of tenancy so as to prevent the exploitation of the cultivators by their landlords.

The records of the different Congress Governments show that almost the first step each of them took was to scale down debts through the agency of Boards set up by law for the purpose. To refer to two of them only, the U. P. Congress Government made an attempt to indicate, in a general way, the proportionate reduction that was regarded as fair and just to both parties. The Congress Government of Madras going further, probably because the money-lender there, as I know from what I have heard in Andhra Desa, Tamil Nad, and Kerala, is even more exacting than anywhere else, wiped out all accumulated arrears previous to October 1st, 1932. As regards more recent debts, the unpaid interest was scaled down to 5 per cent only while, from 1938, the maximum rate of interest chargeable on loans was fixed by law at 6½ per cent. In the other Congress provinces also measures to fix a reasonable rate of interest were enacted.

As regards tenancy legislation, we are aware that it is chiefly in the United Provinces and in Bihar among the Congress provinces, that the ministries had to find a solution for the difficult situation created by the *Zemindari* system one of the unfortunate effects of which is the exploitation of the tenant by the landlord. The Congress Government of Bihar passed various laws to that end under the provisions of one of which certain burdensome forms of produce rent were abolished, the interest on

arrears of rent reduced from 12 to $6\frac{1}{4}$ per cent, and certain illegal exactions by landlords made into penal offences. All enhancements in cash rent made between 1st January, 1911, and 31st December, 1936, were cancelled. Further, in satisfaction of arrears of rent for which landlords obtain decrees, it was provided that only so much of the holding could be put up for sale would be sufficient to cover the decretal amount. Lastly, the dwelling houses and immediate possessions and adjacent lands of the tenant were to be exempt from sale.

Legislation to regulate and restrict the activities of money-lenders was enacted and agricultural income tax imposed on the land-owning classes. Arrangements were also made with the ministry of the United Provinces for the fuller utilisation of the United Province Agricultural College and the Bihar Veterinary College by students of both the provinces.

A year's moratorium on debts was declared almost immediately after the Congress Government took office in the United Provinces. This was followed by legislation aimed at the reduction of debt and improvement of the tenancy laws. In Bombay, a one-year moratorium for the peasants who were most heavily involved was decreed and this was followed by legislation providing for the registration and licensing of money-lenders. Under it, they could be compelled to produce proper accounts before courts; compound interest on loans was abolished and the rate of interest limited to 9 per cent for secured and 12 per cent for unsecured loans. In Orissa, a number of tenancy laws for protecting the tenants from some of the worst harass-

ments to which they had been liable in the past, were enacted. The Congress Government vacated office before it could take any steps to control those rivers which bring flood and devastation to this province every few years.

Some reference has also to be made to the increased facilities provided for education, for improvement of water supply and medical aid in rural areas, for development of village industries as well as to the decrease in the revenue due to reductions and remissions in land revenue, abolition of grazing fees, and loss in excise through the adoption of Prohibition. This went hand in hand with reduction in the salaries and allowances of ministers and of members of the legislatures.

This far from adequate account shows the different ways in which the Congress Governments tried to give effect to the promises made in their election manifestos and undoubtedly proves their love for the masses.

The Practical Religion Of The Congress

Sree Ramkrishna Paramhansa gave what many consider the greatest message to modern India when he said, "Religion is not for empty bellies". These words pointed the path of duty to the first and greatest of his immediate disciples, Swami Vivekananda, and he summed up the need of India when he explained for us the words of his master by saying,

' So long as a single dog in my country is without food, my religion will be to feed it.

May not one suggest that the hunger which he mentioned has reference to all the primary needs of India.

and includes not merely the satisfaction of the particular physical need but also supplying clothes to the naked, medical aid to the sick, education to those unable to pay for it, and spiritual consolation to those who seek it ? It is to this glorious work that the Ramkrishna Mission has devoted itself and this, to my mind, explains its wide appeal for all ranks, races, castes, and creeds.

To Mahatma Gandhi and to the Congress belongs the credit of not only theoretically importing this message into the sphere of politics but also of implementing it there practically. It is this which has won such wonderful support for the Congress so far at least as its work for the benefit of the rural areas is concerned. And whatever our differences over other matters, there cannot, in my opinion, be any doubt that it is the duty and the privilege of every one who calls himself an Indian to do everything which lies in his power to assist Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress to successfully carry out the Agrarian Programme which was officially accepted long before any one could even dream that our one important non-communal All-India organisation would one day come to have a predominant voice in giving a shape to the future political and economic destinies of our motherland.

CHAPTER IV

COTTAGE INDUSTRIES AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The subject of this chapter must of necessity possess great interest for every Indian who cannot contemplate, except with feelings of great sorrow, the difficulties under which our people are labouring.

The Gandhian Solution Of Unemployment

Turning to the question of food, we find that the total production of food amounts in India to 60 to 70 million tons from which we have to deduct, apart from wastage, the quantities necessary for seed, for feeding cattle, and for export. It has been said by those who have made a special study of this matter that these items do not total less than 10 million tons. This leaves about 50 to 60 million tons for our use. In 1931, the total population of India was round about 352 millions. This means less than one pound daily per each head of population. In a speech made early in 1940, the Viceroy predicted that by 1941, the population would be round about 400 millions in which case the amount of food available daily per each head of population works out at a little more than half a pound.

Sir William Hunter, the historian of Orissa and of India who was Director of Statistics in the seventies of the last century, said at that time that in British India

alone, 40 million people lived and died in a state of half-starvation. No one has yet challenged the correctness of this statement. The population has nearly doubled itself since that time but the production of food has not shown corresponding increase.

Sir George Grierson, another great statistician under Government, writing 20 years after Sir William Hunter said,

Briefly, all persons in India of the labouring class and 10 per cent of the artisan or cultivating classes or 45 per cent of the total population are insufficiently fed or housed or both. It follows that nearly 100 millions of people in British India are living in extreme poverty.

Dr. H. H. Mann, Director of Agriculture in Bombay, after 20 years' close study and investigation came, in 1927, to the conclusion that

The problem of providing an adequate amount of food for the whole population of India was the problem of problems with us."

If he was writing today, he would have drawn a much darker picture for, with the reduction in the price of agricultural products, the economic condition of the cultivator has grown worse still.

Sir John Megaw, Surgeon-General of India, estimated only the other day that 61 per cent of the population are insufficiently nourished.

Improved methods of intensive cultivation will have the effect of increasing the total amount of food produced, but this will be possible only when the people adopt them which again will be possible only when they are literate. We all know that, after more than 150 years of British

rule, the percentage of literacy in India in 1931 was 8.1 only. It is therefore that the Congress has all along been laying emphasis on the abolition of illiteracy and on propaganda for improved agricultural methods. If this can be carried through to a successful issue all over India, our supply of available food may be increased and a remedy found for the present chronic state of starvation. But, even then, there can be no prosperity in the economic sense so long as the masses depend on agriculture as practically the one means of their support.

This has engaged the earnest attention of National India which has spoken through its leader, Mahatma Gandhi. His observations on this point are worth-quoting. He said,

The bulk of the population is agricultural and Indian agriculture involves very hard work for certain short periods and almost complete inactivity for the rest of the year. These periods of inactivity are, in the great majority of cases, spent in idleness. But where the cultivator pursues some craft which will employ him and his family at times when they are not required in the fields—a craft in which continuity of employment is not essential, the proceeds of that craft are a saving from waste and therefore a clear gain. The most typical of such crafts and the one most widely pursued is the production of homespun cotton cloth for daily use.

This synthesis of agriculture and industry was contrived by Mahatma Gandhi and offers a practical solution of the grinding poverty of our masses so eloquently referred to by that well-known economist Mr. Monohar Lal, at one time an Executive Member of the Punjab Government, who said,

It (the life of the masses) is a picture of literal starvation, mental and physical. It can represent the life of no unit.

Relief Of Unemployment Through Taxation

India, like the rest of the world, is faced by the problem of unemployment. Various commissions to suggest remedies have been appointed and they have submitted very interesting and learned reports. Among the remedies suggested are the following :—services and industries should be Indianised, the age of retirement from Government service should be lowered, compulsory primary education should be introduced in order to absorb the educated unemployed, public works should be started on a large scale and working hours reduced. It has also been proposed that India should be industrialised and that doles should be given to the unemployed.

The one feature common to all these suggestions is that the prevalent unemployment should be met not by providing additional employment but some contrivance which will help the unemployed at the expense of the employed. So far as the starting of public works on a large scale and the giving of doles are concerned, we should very clearly realise that they have to be paid for, and that money for these purposes must, at the last resort, come from taxes levied on our already impoverished motherland.

If it is argued that fresh taxes will be contrived in such a way as to touch the rich only, I would reply by saying that there are limits to the taxable capacity of even the rich, and that going beyond this limit would merely have the effect of killing the goose that lays the golden egg. From a careful study of the Income Tax

Returns for 1932-33, it appears that, out of a total population of 272 million in British India, about 564,134 persons, that is about .002 per cent of the population, earned Rs. 1,000/- or more per year; about 217,171 or about .001 per cent earned more than Rs. 1,000/- but less than Rs. 2,000/- per year, while only 355 people in the whole of India had incomes of rupees one lakh and more. These figures, the accuracy of which has not been challenged from any quarter, are sufficient proof of our low taxable capacity. No reasonable man can hope that much may be expected by taxing the comparatively well-off in our motherland.

As the number of the taxable well-off is limited, it inevitably follows that there cannot be any permanent and satisfactory solution of this pressing problem by depending on this source to finance public works or for the giving of doles on a very large scale which only can remove the universal poverty from which India is suffering.

Relief Of Unemployment Through Large-Scale Industrialisation

A suggestion put forward time and again is that industrialisation on a large scale along Western lines would solve the unemployment problem. It is conceded that, under modern conditions, no sane man can dream of doing without large scale production concerned with the manufacture of the heavy chemicals, of steel and iron, and other primary needs of civilised life. But let no one be deluded into thinking that, necessary as these factories are for

economic self-sufficiency, they can either abolish, or even materially reduce, the volume of unemployment. If that were so, we would not have unemployment on the gigantic scale we see in such highly industrialised and progressive countries as Britain and the United States of America.

That the use of machinery of increasing efficiency must inevitably have the effect of throwing more and more workers out of employment was pointed out by Marx in the series of articles contributed by him to the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* beginning on the 4th April, 1849, which, later on, were published under the title of *Wage-Labour and Capital*. The correctness of his views is proved by facts like the following. The power-driven Ingersoll spade with which excavations are carried out, can do the work formerly done by four hundred men. In 1850, one man with a pickaxe could extract 800 tons of ore in one year, today with an electric drill he can, without any difficulty, extract 24,000 tons. In 1932, one worker made 453 bricks a day but, by 1934, he could turn out 1,500 bricks. It also appears that in 1932, the services of 250 women were required to manufacture 2,500 cigarettes a minute at a particular cigarette factory at Ivry in France but that the same number could be turned out with the help of improved machinery by not more than two of them in 1935.

The ultimate effect of large-scale production was pointed out in the following memorable passage written by Professor G. D. H. Cole. He said,

The new industrialism may be able to master the secret of production But that will not profit it unless it can find.

means to use the productive capacity that is in its hands. What if, the more each worker produces, the more other workers he throws out of employment? . . . Society will have to support a great body of unemployed, and each new technical victory of science, will but serve to add to their number. For their support, toll—increasing toll—will have to be levied on those who are at work . . . For the employed must pay for the unemployed; there is no other source from which their maintenance can come.

Today we find that the unemployed millions in advanced countries like Britain are assisted with doles paid largely out of taxes imposed on the well-off. We have already seen that this method of relieving unemployment is out of the question in India, from which the conclusion follows that large-scale industrialisation, however desirable on account of other considerations, cannot be regarded as a solution of the problem of unemployment.

Higher Standard Of Life And Relief Of Unemployment

Another suggestion is that the standard of living of the masses should be materially raised. It is held that if the wants of the people are increased, there will be a greater demand for all kinds of articles. This must encourage their production and distribution and thus automatically increase the volume of employment. The criticism which suggests itself immediately is that a higher standard of living presupposes higher income and where is this to come from in a country where, according to the latest estimate, the annual per capita income is not more than Rs. 50/-? Our real difficulty is that, as a nation, we cannot afford even a sufficient amount of food for every one of the 400 millions of India. I do not claim to be an economist, but it seems to me that any increase

in the income should, in the first instance, be utilised for providing a sufficiency of the bare necessities of life, such as food and clothing, after which will come comforts.

There is a still more serious objection to this particular way of solving the problem. Capitalism as a satisfactory economic system is slowly losing its hold on the world. It has had its days of usefulness and, today, we are trying to find out a better and a more satisfactory economic system. As in the West, the conflict between capital and labour, whether agricultural or industrial, has already made its appearance in India and it cannot be said with justice that, in all cases, this conflict is being waged in an unobjectionable way. Supposing that we are able to raise the standard of living of our labourers, its logical result will be that, with increased wants, his bargaining power will be reduced. He will be in a less favourable position to either refuse to work or to go on strikes. He will be tied down more firmly than now to his job. I would even go so far as to suggest that this is a device suggested, perhaps unconsciously, by capitalism to ensure the creation of a docile and permanent labour force.

Raising the standard of life for the purpose of relieving unemployment by providing fresh avenues of work implies the finding out of new markets or of extending old markets. When, not to speak of the predatory activities of Hitlerite Germany, we see powers like Italy swallowing Abyssinia, and Japan attempting to take China, we have examples of unscrupulous and powerful nations trying to find new markets for their products. Forgetting for the

time being the injustice and the cruelty involved in such procedure, what we are concerned with is that, if successful, though labour is helped by being provided with work, it is the capitalist who enjoys the most substantial gain. So far as we in India are concerned, we are not in a position to create new markets in this way and I question very much whether India, unless her contact with the predatory nations of the West radically changes her mentality, would ever dream of doing so.

Use Of Imported Goods And Unemployment

By the second method which I have called extending old markets, I mean the consumption of larger amounts of articles already in use and also of articles not now in use. It therefore follows that if we are to solve our problem of unemployment in this particular way, we have to see that the goods consumed by us are also produced by us. If the adoption of a higher standard of living implies the consumption of articles of comfort and luxury, it is not we who shall be benefited but those concerned in their production and distribution. Let me make my point clear by an example which must be familiar to every Indian. Before we imported cotton stuff from Lancashire, there was ample work for all our weavers. Now what has happened is that not all our weavers find employment though the population and, along with it, the demand for cloth have gone up. As the result of wearing fine cotton fabrics in place of coarse home-spun which, by the way, is an instance of a rise in the standard of living, Lancashire may now boast of a few millionaires. The standard

of life of the Lancashire operative has gone up but at our expense. Ample proof is afforded by the broadcast of Winston Churchill who is reported to have said,

My friends, to whom I speak—the working men—let me tell you that India has quite a lot to do with the wage-earners of Great Britain. If we lost India it would not be a hundred thousand unemployed; it would be more like two million bread-winners, who would be tramping the streets. We have, in this island, forty-five millions living at a higher level than the people of any other country. One-third of these would have to go down, out, or under, if we ceased to be a great Empire with world-wide connection and trade. That would be the fate of the larger population of Little England.

I have given only one instance of the result of the use of imported articles but many such may be multiplied easily. We have looked on helplessly while handicraft after handicraft has died a natural death. Those following these handicrafts have been compelled to take to agriculture as a means of earning their living and the pressure on land is such that we are faced with the grim spectre of chronic starvation.

It therefore follows that every time we buy an imported article, we are exporting our purchasing power, and helping in raising the standard of living of the citizen of some other country and, to that extent, lowering our own standards and assisting in creating further unemployment. It is also a truth, probably a disagreeable truth, that the factory system of production where the work of many hands can be, and is, performed by a few hands is also responsible for our wide-spread unemployment. This is the only logical argument and the rational justification for the drive to use Swadeshi or home-made articles and, more than that, of comparatively expensive hand-made

articles produced in the rural areas in preference to cheaper Indian factory-made articles with better finish. I acknowledge that this is, from the selfish point of view, loss of money, but the very hard and disagreeable fact of the starvation of millions of our countrymen and country women on account of want of employment stares us in the face. We cannot afford to neglect their interests as we have been doing in the past. We have a responsibility as leaders, of thought and have to set an example in our daily lives. Empty promises have been made so often that we have forfeited the confidence of the masses and the only way to regain it is to prove our concern for them by taking effective steps to assist them. One of the best ways of doing this, I contend, is to use extensively the products of cottage industries. And this was the aim of the determined drive of the Congress Governments to revive dying, and to introduce new, cottage industries in the provinces administered by them, a matter discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Some Thought-Provoking Statistics

I have not, so long, given any facts in support of my contention that cottage industries, if properly organised, are a valuable method of combating unemployment. I shall now refer to what was actually done in 1939, by the All-India Spinners' Association. As is well-known, this organisation, with its headquarters at Ahmedabad and branches in every part of India, has undertaken the task

of having certified and registered spinners, weavers, and artisans, all engaged in the production of pure *Khadi*. In 1939, this organisation gave regular employment to 2 lakh 82 thousand spinners who drew as wages Rs. 21 lakh 55 thousand. The number of certified and registered weavers who were in regular employment was about 19 thousand while the wages drawn by them was about Rs. 12 lakh. Certified and registered artisans numbered 6 thousand 8 hundred, their wages amounting to Rs. 5 lakh 65 thousand. Therefore, the total number of certified and registered workers employed by this one association only was 3 lakh 8 thousand and these earned as wages Rs. 39 lakh 20 thousand. According to the League of Nations, the per capita allowance of cloth should not be less than 30 square yards. In India, our average consumption is round about 11·3 square yards. These figures are sufficient to prove what a future there is for the *Khaddar* programme of Mahatma Gandhi.

Before I leave this matter, I ought to remind my readers that the 3 lakh 8 thousand workers employed by the All-India Spinners' Association were a part only of those engaged in the manufacture of *Khaddar*. There are many organisations, businessmen, etc., having no connection with this body, engaged in making and selling *Khaddar*. I shall only content myself with saying that all people employed both by the All-India Spinners' Association as well as by the other organisations would not have found employment but for the impetus given to the movement by our great national leader. After this, who will say that cottage industries are not, at least, a partial solution

of the problem of unemployment? They may not offer handsome amounts to those who follow them but there is little doubt that, if pursued honestly and steadfastly, they can yield a regular and humble income and that is all that can be expected in a poor country like India where the national income, as already stated, is not more than Rs. 50 per head per year.

Every serious student of industrial economics is aware that, today, India is in a position to manufacture all her sugar and match, three-fourths of her cotton stuff, two-thirds of her iron and steel, and a large part of her cement and paper and yet she is unable to find employment for more than about $1\frac{1}{2}$ million factory workers. When she has developed her industries sufficiently, she may be able to employ say 2 million labourers.

According to the Census of 1931, out of a total population of about 352 millions, about $15\frac{1}{2}$ millions were supported by industry. Of these again, only $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions were engaged in 8,143 factories. It thus follows that in 1931, about 14 millions were supported by cottage industries. In 1935, the number of factories had increased by about 700 but the average number of persons employed had increased to the extent of 180,000 only. The mere increase of factory industries therefore cannot, and will not, absorb all the people who are without work. We would be perfectly safe if we go further and say that in case factories are started for the large scale production of articles which are now being manufactured at home, such factories will never be able to absorb even those who are at present engaged in producing them.

According to recognised authorities, weaving on the hand-loom stands next to agriculture as regards the number of people who are supported by it and provides occupation for no less than 10 millions in India. There was a time when their products had to compete with cotton fabrics manufactured in non-Indian countries only. Of late, the number of cotton mills in India has increased from 250 in 1929-30, to 304 in 1935-36, the latest year for which statistics are available. These give employment to about $4\frac{1}{2}$ lakh of workers only. When, in future, India finds herself able to produce all the cotton cloth she requires in her own mills, she cannot very well give employment to more than an additional lakh and a half or, at most, to two lakhs. Even if every one of the labourers is drawn from the present hand-loom weavers, it is disquieting to think of the fate of the rest who, if our figures are correct, cannot by any means be less than 7 to 8 million on the supposition that, at least one million among them, are engaged in the production of silk, woollen, and similar other stuff.

We have thus proved that the slavish imitation of Western industrial methods must lead to one result only viz. large output coupled with the employment of constantly diminishing numbers of labourers with every improvement in that type of industrial efficiency which goes under the name of rationalisation.

Mahatma Gandhi, with his insight into the real nature of this vital problem, recognised the fact that hand-loom weaving is followed by a very large number of people who cannot command much capital. At the same time, he

felt that they had to be provided for somehow not only to diminish unemployment but also to reduce the pressure on land. Hence his *Khaddar* programme.

Opinion of An English Economist

Orthodox economists, Indian and non-Indian, as well as so-called practical men ridiculed the *Khaddar* programme when it was originally put forward by Mahatma Gandhi. It was criticised as the dream of a visionary who desired that India should revert to mediaeval conceptions of industry in the new world brought into existence by the Industrial Revolution. But even in those days, there were some Western economists who realised that while they could not see eye to eye with Mahatma Gandhi in every detail, they could not ignore its importance in its Indian setting. One of these was Dr. Gilbert Slater who, in an article entitled "Protection for India" contributed to the *Asiatic Review*, observed in April, 1923,

I do not myself endorse Mr. Gandhi's views on this matter, but I must confess that I have a good deal of sympathy with them, and I consider that there is much more reason in them than would at first sight appear But consider the conditions of Indian village life. Though they vary from one part of India to another, everywhere the monsoons are the dominating fact. Generally speaking, we may say that there is a brief period in the year when all the available labour is wanted for agricultural work, a longer period when, employment is fairly good, and longer periods when there is little or nothing to be done. In the old days, cotton-spinning was the great subsidiary industry that occupied the period of compulsory agricultural leisure, and Mr. Gandhi desires that this should be the case once more. A mean of various observations and calculations indicates that two annas a day is about as much as a man or woman can on the average earn with the spinning-wheel, and this is indeed a miserable pittance. But two annas a day is better than nothing, and two annas a day earned by each of several members of the family during the four

or five months when there is no agricultural work to be done may make all the difference between adequate nutrition and semi-starvation.

After this, let no one criticise the *Khadi* programme as unpractical for though it may be so in highly developed Western countries, it certainly meets the requirements of India. We shall see very soon how the love for the masses which induced Mahatma Gandhi to recommend it was responsible for its acceptance by the Congress leaders who, when they entered office, did whatever lay in their power to popularise it with a view to relieving the chronic mass unemployment, specially in our rural areas, which is so tragic a feature of our economic life.

Dwindling Handicrafts And Unemployment

Hitherto reference has been made only to the kind of cottage industry connected with the production of cotton fabrics. But every one familiar with conditions prevailing in rural India is aware that the handicrafts practised even now are nearly as numerous as they were a century ago. The only difficulty is that, on account of competition with factory made articles, our artisans are not getting remunerative prices for them. As a natural consequence, these are languishing and may ultimately disappear altogether. As proved by the figures quoted already, India is not in a position to allow this. If once cheap power is made available in every part of India, and it may be said parenthetically that efforts to this end are being put forth in nearly every province, it would not be difficult to organise the different cottage industries on improved lines with the help of electrically powered small

machines. By doing so, the cost of production would be diminished and, at the same time, the finish improved so that they would be able to compete with their factory made rivals on equal terms. But it is too much to expect that, at least at the beginning, they can be marketed as cheaply as the products of large factories.

We know that modern rice and flour mills and oil-crushing factories have nearly killed the age-old cottage industries of wheat and rice-milling and oil-crushing added to which is the fact that the white flour and polished rice produced by them are deprived of certain essential vitamins and mineral salts. All these are adulterated by either unscrupulous mill-owners or the middlemen who stand between the producers and the consumers. I have described elsewhere how this problem is being tackled by the All-India Village Industries Association.

Then again, our village blacksmiths used to supply all our requirements in the way of agricultural implements such as spades, pick-axes, crow-bars, hammers, etc., but competition from foreign and Indian firms which have specialised in their manufacture on the factory scale, has driven them off the field. These people have taken to agriculture not as cultivators enjoying some kind of right over the land they cultivate, but either as tenants-at-will or as landless labourers. I quite appreciate the fact that, before the home-made implements can hope to command a large market which will include such large buyers as the Railway, the Public Works and other Government Departments, District Boards, Municipalities, etc., they will have to be standardised, and improved, methods

and, probably, machinery used for their manufacture. But this, in my view, does not present insurmountable difficulties.

Certain kinds of cotton, silk, and even woollen textiles may be classed under cottage industries and given protection by legislation against mass production by large-scale factories till they are sufficiently developed. If we insist on protection in order to foster the development of industries like iron, textile, and sugar, National India finds no reason why cottage industries should not claim protection not only against foreign, but also against internal, competition from large scale Indian factories,

Protection Of Cottage Industries

The question is what form should this protection take in order to discourage competition from Indian and foreign factories. A method which suggests itself immediately is to put some kind of duty or sales tax on the corresponding products of Indian factories and a similar, or even a higher, amount of custom duty on foreign imports. For instance, it has been suggested, that the mills should cater for the well-to-do who use coats, shirts, fine *saris*, *dhoties*, and *chhaddars*, while the hand loom would meet the requirements of poorer people who prefer the coarser fabrics on account of their durability. The latter should find a ready market in the rural areas. Mills should not be allowed to use counts below 20. A deterrent sales tax on mill cloth and a high license fee should be imposed on dealers in mill cloth for the purpose of making the sale of mill-made cotton fabrics unremunerative in the country-

side. The situation could probably be met by providing hand-loom weavers with credit and marketing facilities on equitable terms. Similarly, the products of flour, rice, and oil mills may have a suitable sales tax laid on them for the encouragement of *chakki atta*, hand-pounded rice, and *ghani* oil.

As matters stand at present, I do not see much prospect of the survival of a large majority of our cottage industries unless they are afforded some kind of protection and unless the right kind of organisation is created for ensuring a steady market for their products.

The justification for the adoption of this policy is two-fold. First and foremost, their proper organisation would tend to give regular employment to some of our people while others will be able to utilise profitably the enforced leisure they have now to put up with as agriculturists. So far as the latter are concerned, some of these industries would bring in cash while others, like spinning and weaving, would enable them to conserve their resources by preventing expenditure on items like clothing.

The Possibilities Of Cottage Industries

As, for those who will devote their whole time to cottage industries, it has been estimated by no less a person than the Congress Minister of Development of Bihar that, if only a dozen cottage industries are started on a province-wide scale under conditions such as those outlined above, they could easily employ 75,000 to 100,000 people. If we add to this number, the people who will

supply the raw materials required in the different cottage industries, it is quite likely that another lakh or so will be provided for. Counting their families and dependents such a scheme, if successfully carried out, would imply livelihood provided for at least 5 lakh and, it should be remembered, that all these people will be drawn from the masses. So far as the more educated people are concerned, we have not taken into account the managers, supervisors, brokers, salesmen, and similar other people always connected with the production and distribution of such things.

Apart from the employment of people who are now eking out a miserable existence, there are certain other important contingent advantages which must not be lost sight of. There will be an increase in the national income. With an increase in the purchasing power, the standard of living which is now miserably low will tend to rise. The starting of these industries will lead to the development of the resources which are now lying unexplored and unused. They will have the effect of developing the spirit of enterprise, of familiarising our people with modern conditions of life, with new processes and with new methods. They will also give them a wider outlook on life and will open out before them new ways of improving their economic position. In fact, they will tend to communicate the spark of life to the half-starved and intellectually stolid agriculturists of India. This one fact alone of shaking them out of the mental inertia of ages seems to me sufficient justification for the adoption of this bold and forward policy of encouraging and maintaining our cottage industries.

Madam Chiang Kai-shek On Employment

In August and September, 1938, Madam Chiang Kai-shek, the brilliant and patriotic helpmate of the Chinese generalissimo, contributed a series of very thought-provoking and interesting articles to the *Spectator* of London. In the course of a discussion on the reconstruction of China after the end of the war, she observed :—

I should like to see village industry carefully developed wherever it is possible for raw materials to be produced and worked up to supply the daily needs of the people. There will have to be mechanical aid in some cases, but I hope that machinery never will be brought to China to save labour as its first principle and requirement. Machinery should be used to make necessities which hand cannot make, but there it should stop. Nor should cut-throat competition in manufacture be permitted. In that the workmen suffer.

We have already had a taste of competitive manufacture and we have had a few lessons taught us by the racketeer, the gangster, the misguided labour agitator and his misused unions. Surely we shall be wise enough to profit by all that, and also profit by what has happened in other parts of the world as a result of over-production by labour-saving devices operating upon a large and uncontrolled scale. We have an old proverb which enjoins us to "take warning by the cart ahead". It will be criminal of us if we do not. If we emerge safely from the calamities of this war there is one brake that will be put upon us that should have restraining influence upon development of too many large industries. That is the brake of exhausted finance. It will not be easy to plunge into great schemes of factory development and that, to my mind, is a good thing. There is so much to be done by hand, so many hands to do it, that wisdom dictates energetic arrangement of opportunities for manual work just as quickly as circumstances will allow.

India has been fortunate because, unlike China, she has been spared the direct horrors of war. Let it not be said that, like China, where "there is so much to do by hand and so many hands to do", we needed war to learn the very important and essential lesson

that our primary attention should be devoted to the encouragement and development of our cottage industries. In spite of whatever capitalist economists may say to the contrary, the political and economic regeneration of our country will be very largely helped by the adoption of this policy. And that is why I am an advocate of the protection of indigenous cottage industries which I regard as the only satisfactory way of assisting in their development and of combating unemployment.

In the next chapter, we shall learn something about the steps taken by the different Congress Governments to resuscitate such among the cottage industries as are dying slowly, to encourage the development of those which have managed to survive, and to introduce new ones.

CHAPTER V

COTTAGE INDUSTRIES IN CONGRESS INDIA

I have, at the invitation of the different Provincial Indian Christian Associations, visited, from time to time, various parts of India where I have been the grateful recipient of most generous hospitality not only from the members of my own community but, what is a source of very great gratification to me, from our non-Christian brethren—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and even Jain. In some places, I have been the guest of the exceedingly well-to-do and, in other places, in order to ascertain for myself the conditions prevailing in rural areas, I have chosen to be the guest, always welcome, of agriculturists—Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and, on one occasion, Sikh. But my largest contacts have naturally been with Christian Indians belonging to the middle class in all parts of India. It would be invidious to mention names where every one was so kind to me and most cheerfully pressed me to accept the very best of what he had. I, therefore, wish to convey to all of them my gratitude for the graceful hospitality showered on me. I am still more grateful for the very extensive conveniences placed at my disposal for conducting my enquiries into some of the economic problems with which we are faced to-day and the ways in which they are sought to be solved in different parts of India. The problems of finding remunerative spare-time occupation for the agriculturist and of

solving unemployment among the less educated were two matters which engaged my attention during my investigations.

My task was rendered comparatively easy as in all or nearly all the places and the institutions I visited, I found Christian Indians working, generally in an honorary capacity. Nor was assistance in my enquiries wanting from my numerous non-Christian hosts and friends. They always made all arrangements which lay in their power to make my investigations as easy and pleasant as possible. Congressmen from ministers down to village workers were equally kind to me.

If it is asked why the subject I have chosen for this chapter possesses such an engrossing interest for me, I would in reply state that out of the 75 lakhs of Christian Indians we have in India to-day, not more than $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 lakhs live in urban areas and earn their living by following urban occupations. The problems of the rural Christian Indian are in no way different from the problems of the rural non-Christian. Any measure such as encouragement of cottage industries calculated to benefit the rural non-Christian must, of necessity, benefit the rural Christian Indian. I have come to feel that the growth of nationalism in my small and humble community today is really due to the recognition of this fundamental fact—something often lost sight of in the deplorable communal struggle between the two major communities now going on in our motherland. We appreciate the very important fact that, as our economic and political interests are indetical, we too have to share the labour involved in every

programme intended for the amelioration of the masses and, as a community, we are prepared to do so cheerfully. But we can hardly thrust ourselves in till our services are requisitioned.

It will be noticed that I have confined myself to a description of what was being done in the Congress provinces and also that I have said nothing about the activities of the Congress Coalition Government of Assam. The reason for dealing with the Congress provinces is that so far as the Indian Christian community is concerned, about 5 lakhs only out of a total population of 60 to 65 lakhs living in British India are to be found in the three non-Congress provinces of Bengal, Punjab, and Sind. From the All-India standpoint, the interest of the Christian Indian lies more in the Congress than in the non-Congress provinces. No description of the work done in Assam has been attempted because, though I am familiar with the province various parts of which I visited every year when I was Inspector of Colleges for the Calcutta University, I have not been there from 1937. As I have no personal knowledge of matters as they stand there at present, I have intentionally refrained from saying anything about the work done in this province. The North-West Frontier Province has also been omitted for a similar reason. In what follows, I have tried to make my account descriptive rather than critical which latter would naturally imply the institution of comparisons between the value of the work done in the different provinces and assessment of the benefits they have conferred on the masses. I have done so because I feel that my knowledge is not sufficiently

intimate to enable me to arrive at a fairly accurate estimate of the comparative value of the work.

I consider it necessary that I should make it absolutely clear that the account I am giving makes no claim to be a complete one. Any attempt in this direction would have entailed a thorough study of all types of activities for which I had neither the time nor the opportunity. I have, therefore, tried to touch what may be called the "high lights" only. I have, however, visited practically all the institutions referred to below. Almost all the facts and figures offered were supplied by the ladies and gentlemen connected with this type of activity either in an honorary or a paid capacity but some are taken from official records.

While the account which follows makes no pretension to be a complete and an adequate one, it does claim to be a fairly accurate description of what was attempted in the different provinces referred to below. I should be sorry indeed if the inadequacy of the account should give rise to the impression that these activities were confined to the items referred to below. It is, therefore, that I would once again emphasise the fact that, in what follows, I have attempted to describe what came under my notice, what my attention was drawn to by my numerous friends who are to-day playing their part in national reconstruction of this type, and what possessed special interest for me either on account of my personal predilections or because of their probable utility to the poorer members of my community.

Bihar

As soon as the Congress Cabinet took charge of administrative work, it turned its attention to the task of encouraging hand-spinning and hand-weaving specially in rural areas. With this end in view, it sanctioned Rs. 30,000, which was spent through the All-India Spinners' Association to organise the production and distribution of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth on a large scale and also to extend the work to new areas. In addition to this amount, a special grant of a further sum of Rs. 10,000 was made to the Ranchi Weavers' Co-operative Stores to enable it to rehabilitate its affairs and to assist the development of the handloom industry in Chota Nagpur, the interests of which, the more progressive among its inhabitants complained, had not been properly looked after previously.

This type of good work was also introduced in jails. For instance, at the Central Jail, Bhagalpur, carding and spinning by power for manufacturing woollen goods and *charka* spinning for *Khaddar* were in use. The quantity produced was more than sufficient to meet all the requirements of the prisoners confined in this jail. It supplied a considerable amount of yarn to the Gaya Central Jail to enable it to increase its outturn of *Khadi*. It is understood that needy prisoners of the Bhagalpur Central Jail at the time of their release were supplied with free *Khaddar* clothing. The female prisoners were also taught *charka* spinning. In the year ended the 31st March, 1939, the prisoners were able to weave 3,000 yards of *Khaddar*

with thread spun by themselves. In addition to the above, the prisoners were taught to rear *eri* and to spin and weave *eri* silk and *tassar*. Lastly, arrangements were made to teach the following handicrafts to prisoners: blacksmithy, carpentry, cane work, tailoring, dyeing, and tape weaving. They turned out useful iron and wooden articles for household use and also manufactured furniture which found ready sale.

The Bihar Cottage Industries Marketing Organisation gave publicity to the hand-woven textiles of this province in different ways and through many agencies with the result that, in 1938, goods worth $1\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs were sold. More than 60 new attractive designs were added to the standard list of patterns and it was expected that the sales would be higher still.

In order to encourage the production of *Khadi*, the Bihar Government passed orders that the uniforms of peons, orderlies, and the police should be of *Khaddar*. Further, the Khaddar (Name Protection) Act, 1934, was brought into operation to afford protection to the names "Khaddar" and "Khadi" as trade descriptions for "cloth woven on handlooms in India from cotton yarn spun in India."

Finding that the development of the indigenous silk industry was being hindered by the use of cheap imported spun silk, the Congress Government installed a silk twisting plant at Bhagalpur at a cost of Rs. 15,000 non-recurring and Rs. 3,500 recurring. Two stations, one in Manbhum district and the other in the Santhal Parganas, were started to supply *tassar* silk eggs to the *tassar* silk rearers

residing in villages situated in the interior. Small bonuses were also given to the mulberry silk rearers of Purnea district.

Attention was paid to expanding the inland fishery industry which provides a welcome addition to the income of the small agriculturist. Patna and Ranchi are the two centres from which fry was supplied to every part of the province. In 1938, Bihar exported more than 60,000 maunds of fish. It has been found that North Bihar is making rapid progress and that there is a revival of the fish trade in South Bihar. But as Chota Nagpur has always been backward in this particular direction, a strenuous attempt was made to introduce pisciculture in it.

The Congress Cabinet was making elaborate arrangements for technical and industrial training. It is outside the scope of this chapter to mention anything about the facilities created for instruction in medium and large scale industries with which we are not concerned here. But so far as training men for developing cottage industries is concerned, we find that the arrangements included theoretical and practical training for educated young men belonging to the middle class in technical and, in what may be called, bias schools, practical training *only* for the less educated boys of the middle class, general and vocational education for women, and industrial training for aboriginals and *Harijans*.

- In addition to the Cottage Industries Institute at Patna, the Congress Government was contemplating the establishment of handicraft schools at Pusa and Purulia and the expansion of the industrial chemistry class in the Science

College, Patna. In all these places, both theoretical and practical instruction were to be given to such educated young men as might be willing to take up cottage industries and to run them on modern lines. Arrangements were also made for the training of undergraduates in press work and of matriculates in compositors' work at the Central Government Press. For middle class boys who lack the necessary intelligence and brains, special arrangements were made in the five vocational schools situated in different parts of the province for giving them training in different types of home-industries. For this, they were given special grants which, in 1938, came up to Rs. 10,000.

In order to train middle class young men in improved methods of tanning and leather work, two demonstration parties were started at an approximate cost of Rs. 7,000 recurring and Rs. 1,500 non-recurring. These visited different areas and taught new methods to middle class people. It was hoped that they would, in their turn, start small tanneries and leather works in which they would employ the poor *moochees* and *chamars* who are generally without an adequate amount of work. With the same end in view, special classes to teach the manufacture of writing and blotting paper were opened at Patna where there were arrangements for a six months' course. It is understood that some of them have already placed their hand-made paper on the market though it cannot be said that it is commanding a sufficiently large sale.

So far as the technical education of women is concerned, some public spirited women started the Aghore-Nari Silpa Pratisthan in which regular courses for teaching

different industries were organised. Here tuition is free. Facilities to enable students to earn while they learn in the shape of the sale proceeds of their work were provided. Here instruction is given in weaving, tailoring, auto-knitting, leather work, toy-making, cane work, wool spinning and weaving, and carpet weaving. The Bihar Government made grants to this institution to encourage the good work that is being done through public initiative.

As for the encouragement of technical and vocational training among the aboriginals, we find that, after coming into power, the Congress Cabinet spent regularly every year Rs. 10,000 for stipends and scholarships to students coming from these classes, for this particular purpose. As stated elsewhere, Government also made a special grant of Rs. 10,000 to the Weavers' Co-operative Society of Ranchi so that it might take its part in the development of handloom industry and thus provide remunerative employment for those living in rural areas in this part of Bihar. Their concern for the well-being of these people did not, however, end here. In order to help the women-workers in the Jharia Coalfields who are generally of aboriginal stock and who, as the result of legislation were not permitted to work underground and had thus lost remunerative employment, Government started two handicrafts institutes where they were taught weaving and basket making. This entailed a recurring expenditure of about Rs. 10,000 per year.

So far as the *Harijans* are concerned, the Bihar Government spent about Rs. 23,000 per year for special stipends for the "general" education of *Harijan* young men. These were not showing much eagerness for industrial

training, none the less, Government provided Rs. 1,200 for stipends only. *Harijans* were permitted to join any of the Government or aided institutions where vocational and technical instruction is imparted free of charge. The stipends were meant to cover their other expenses.

Realising that many honest, hard-working, and reliable young men are unable to utilise their technical knowledge for want of capital, the Bihar Government set apart Rs. 6,000 every year to render them financial aid. It also made grants averaging Rs. 13,000 per year to the Commercial Museum situated in the capital of the province to enlarge its usefulness in developing the commerce and industries of the province.

The Congress Ministry of Bihar as members of the middle class in daily touch with the masses was aware that Bihar does not produce sufficient food to meet its own requirements and that industrial development was the only practical solution of the problem with which the province is faced. Bihar was fortunate in having a minister of the type of Dr. Syed Mahmud in charge of Development. While it is incumbent on every Bihari to trust him and to give him an opportunity of working out the ideas he has put forth in his book on the reconstruction of his province, it is the privilege of every patriotic Indian to wish him all success in the arduous and noble task he set himself.

United Provinces

When the Congress came into power in the U. P., it immediately budgetted Rs. 10,000 for financing an industrial survey of the province. The Industrial policy which

was subsequently developed is based on the data collected in the course of this survey. The first practical step taken consisted in increasing the capital grant of the Industry Department to the extent of Rs. 15,000. By this addition to its resources, the officers were enabled to start enquiries in new and promising fields. These have borne fruit in various directions. Provision was made in the budget for introducing hydro-electric power to help not only the urban but also the rural people and with a view to its utilisation for carrying on cottage industries.

In order to encourage cottage industries concerned with supplying domestic needs, the U. P. Government spent nearly Rs. 40,000 for improving the existing processes of *gur* manufacture and teaching them to cane-growers so that they might utilise their own sugarcane in a profitable way. It further spent about Rs. 15,000 for finding out improved methods of extracting oil which can be practised as a cottage industry. These were taught to the village oilmen with the result that they got more oil from a given quantity of oil seeds than before. Experiments in this direction were continued with a view to finding out still more efficient methods.

Another cottage industry which can be and is practised in villages is hand-spinning and handloom-weaving for encouraging which the U. P. Government spent about Rs. 10,000 every year. Government also provided a ready market at reasonable rates for *Khadi* by passing orders that, whenever possible, the uniforms of Government servants supplied by Government should be made of hand-spun and hand-woven *Khad*dar. Another cottage industry

practised in the countryside, *viz.*, *ghee* making, was assisted by a grant of Rs. 13,000 to provide funds for the organisation of co-operative societies for the production and sale of pure *ghee*.

The claims of those who earn their bread by supplying raw or tanned hide to the consideration of Government were not overlooked. After coming into power, the U. P. Congress Cabinet spent about Rs. 4,000 every year to teach butchers, flayers, and curers improved methods of flaying dead animals and curing their hide.

Knowing that, on account of poverty, the women have taken to the use of glass bangles which are generally imported from foreign countries and with the idea of stopping this drain, as well as of providing a new way of relieving unemployment, the Congress Government spent, on the average, Rs. 5,000 every year to find out and teach improved methods of manufacturing them. In addition to all these which amounted to more than one lakh, the U. P. Government set apart about 30 per cent of the 11 lakhs it was spending for rural development for the encouragement and development of cottage industries.

It also saw that many educated young men who had undergone training in industries were unable to find openings for themselves in industry, in business, or trade connected with them or to develop and expand their business for want of adequate capital. In order to meet this situation, the U. P. Government set apart one lakh to be given as grants under certain conditions. In making these grants, preference was shown to groups of individuals and co-operative organisations. But as it is not possible

for every individual who needs capital to be assisted out of this fund, it subsidised an Industrial Credit Company to the extent of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs. It was understood that this amount would be contributed regularly for some years to come.

Orissa

Want of space prevents me from giving statistics which do not possess much interest for the ordinary reader but, from the pamphlet issued by the Congress Government of Orissa which gives an account of its activities, it appears that Orissa which has practically the same population as Assam, and more than double the population of the North West Frontier Province, has the smallest revenue of all the British Indian provinces and yet, it too, under Congress administration, was spending a very large proportion of its resources in developing its industries, and specially its cottage industries.

The help of the All-India Village Industries Association was availed of in various different directions. About sixty young men were trained to manufacture *gur* from the juice of the palmyra and date palm and these were deputed to rural areas to teach villagers how to draw the juice and to make jaggery (*gur*) out of it. An investigation for evolving an economical process for manufacturing sugar and sugar-candy from *gur* with the help of activated charcoal was started. Preservation of fruits was encouraged and some young men were given training in it. The horn industry for which Orissa has been famous for centuries and which is now in a moribund condition was encouraged with

the help of grants. *Eri* culture and *tassar* rearing were also encouraged.

Grants were made for demonstrating the use of improved *ghani* (oil pressing machines) and paddy husking implements in villages. Peripatetic demonstration to teach villagers satisfactory methods of pisciculture, wool and cotton weaving and dyeing under expert supervision was undertaken. Attention was given to improve rural cottage industries such as the slate industry, basket and mat making, coir weaving, smithy and bell-metal casting. Poultry farming was encouraged by maintaining flocks of leghorns in Government farms in order to distribute their eggs and chickens among villagers. Arrangements were also made to give demonstrations in improved methods of flaying, curing, and tanning. My information is that this was very eagerly availed of by the *chamars* and a certain section of the Muslim population.

Orissa has large areas of forest and undeveloped tracts abounding in bamboos, various kinds of grasses, and other material suitable for the manufacture of paper. These easily available and cheap raw materials were sought to be utilised by the Congress Government which, at its own expense, trained many young men in making hand-made paper. When I was in Orissa in July, 1939, I saw cheap and quite satisfactory envelopes and note-papers in the local market of Cuttack and I feel certain that, when this particular type of cottage industry has become more popular, they will be used very largely by those desirous of supporting our indigenous industries. I found at Hyderabad and Secundarabad in the Nizam's Dominions early in

March, 1939, that the Government there had ordered that, wherever possible, all its correspondence should be carried on in hand-made note paper which is being extensively manufactured locally.

The manufacture of *Khaddar* on a large scale was greatly encouraged through the agency of the All-India Spinners' Association. Grants were made to this body for the extension of spinning and the production of *Khaddar* on an extensive scale. With the assistance of the Government of India, a Textile Marketing Organisation was set up for the production and distribution of handloom products under the revised scheme. The All-India Spinners' Association functioned both as the suppliers of yarn and the agents for the sale of woven fabrics. The Orissa Government passed orders that first preference was to be given to textiles manufactured in jails, after that to *Khadi* which would have to be purchased from the All-India Spinner's Association to ensure that genuine *Khaddar* is being supplied. This naturally stimulated sales and, to a certain extent, helped in the solution of the problem of unemployment in the countryside.

Every effort was made to develop what may be called the industry sense among the young men of the province. Two methods were followed for the attainment of this end. The Congress Government of Orissa gave financial assistance to the All-India Spinners' Association in starting the Madhusudan Village Industries Institute at Cuttack. Here students were trained in hand-spinning and weaving, calico-printing, pottery, paddy-husking, paper-making, and oil-pressing. The Congress Government was also planning

to make arrangements in this institution for the establishment of a demonstration match factory but it went out of office before this could be done.

The Orissa Government felt that the young men of the province should not confine their energies to the production of these few articles only. In order, therefore, to create facilities for training in other industries also it, from the time it came into power, began granting a large number of stipends and scholarships available outside Orissa to properly qualified young men. As it would take too much valuable space to give a detailed account of every one of these stipends, I propose to mention only the most important among them. Stipends were granted for training in textile in the Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute, Bombay, for umbrella making, bell-metal casting and polishing, and pottery at the Industrial Research Laboratory, Calcutta, for oil-pressing and paper-making at the Wardha Training Institute, for match manufacture at the Khadi Pratisthan, Sodepur, Bengal, and for tanning at Bari. It is also understood that a few other stipends were made available for training in commercial art at the Calcutta Government School of Art and for soap-making at the Harcourt Butler Technological Institute, Cawnpore. Lastly, some students who had finished their training in improved methods of fish-curing at the Government fish-curing yards at Tanur, were encouraged to start fish-curing yards of their own while still another young man joined the Madras Fishery Department for general training in fishery work.

Another step in the right direction to create an

interest in cottage industries took the form of a request to the authorities of High and Middle English schools that they should depute suitable teachers for free training in various handicrafts so that they, in their turn, might introduce them among their pupils thus preparing the ground, for at least some of them, for the adoption of these industries as a means of earning their bread.

Soil survey was made to ascertain the availability of *sajimati* for the manufacture of soap. Another scheme for a survey of clay deposits which can be used for the manufacture of pottery was under consideration, while a larger and more ambitious scheme was that of a survey of the province to explore its industrial possibilities. Further, a Board of Industries was constituted under the State Aid to Industries Act to advise the Director of Development on the work to be taken up by the Department of Industries. Lastly, a museum of the arts and crafts of Orissa was started and located in the office of the Development Department.

What has been mentioned in the last paragraph clearly indicates the lines along which the work of developing industries was planned to proceed. As a very poor province, Orissa cannot, under present circumstances, expect to launch out into the organisation or development of any large scale industry. The gentlemen at the helm of affairs were, therefore, confining their activities, very wisely I think, to the development of cottage industries. But the three surveys referred to just now as well as the fact that they set apart the sum of one lakh for, in their language, "encouraging the growth of small scale

industries," very clearly indicate that they did not propose that Orissa should permanently remain a province of small industries. One could easily anticipate that if the Congress Government had been in office for a longer time, the next step would have been in the sphere of medium scale industries carried on with the help of power from which the next step would naturally have been the organisation of one or other of the key industries for which the province may be fitted by reason of an abundant supply of the raw material not speak of the cheap, skilled labour for which this province is already well-known.

Central Provinces

On the 16th January, 1939, a conference to take steps to encourage the development of industries of all types was called by the Congress Cabinet of C. P. in which all the ministers took part. It was stated by the Minister in charge of Industries that while cottage, medium, and large scale industries would all have their rightful place, he would lay special emphasis on cottage industries to relieve unemployment and to secure a balanced rural and urban economy.

The work done up to the end of August, 1939, may be summarised as follows. Two cottage industries institutions for training students in cotton weaving, carpet and *durrie* weaving, toy-making, lacquer work, and cane and basket work manufacture were opened. A class for the training of aboriginals in basket and bamboo work was started in Bhandara district.

A scheme for the training of village *chamars* in the use of offal and skin flaying was introduced. It consisted of bone meal propaganda and the teaching of improved methods of the disposal of the carcasses of animals. A dead cattle institute was also opened at Nagpur to convert all the different parts of dead animals to commercial use. Scientific instruction was given in the art of proper flaying, salting, and curing raw hides, manufacture of flesh and bone manure, extraction of animal fat and preservation of blood, horns, etc.

Experiments for introducing and developing the mulberry and *tassar* silk industries in the province were carried out and a number of demonstration centres opened. Similarly, experiments for the utilization of linseed-stalk fibre were carried out and articles such as twine and rope door-mats (carpets) manufactured.

A grant-in-aid to the All-India Village Industries Association was given for the training of candidates in village industries such as paper-making, oil-pressing, date-palm *gur*-making, and bee-keeping. Another grant-in-aid of Rs. 21,760 was sanctioned for the encouragement of hand-spinning and hand-weaving in rural areas. Industrial scholarships were awarded to students with a view to starting the umbrella-making industry on the cottage scale.

As a result of the grant from the Government of India for the development of handloom industry, the Central Provinces and Berar Weavers' Co-operative Society, Nagpur, was formed with seven branches scattered in the province. During 1938-39, raw materials worth

Rs. 13,661 were distributed to the affiliated societies. Cloth valued approximately at Rs. 34,000 was manufactured by them. The societies weave various new attractive patterns in *saris* and *dhoties* in finer counts and special varieties such as curtains, bedspreads, *durries*, etc.

The staff of the textile section visited several centres inhabited by weavers in the province and introduced 19,364 fly shuttles and sloys and 3,159 dobbies among weavers in the year ended 31st March, 1939.

Bombay

In spite of the presence of a large scale industry such as the cotton mills employing lakhs of operatives, the Congress Government of Bombay, as soon as it assumed the reins of office, turned its attention to the encouragement of cottage industries. I shall not refer to the valuable work done by its Industry Department in providing help in various directions to small industries but shall pass on to a survey of what was done in connection with cottage industries at once.

The Industry Department carried on its propaganda of helping and advancing cotton and silk hand-weaving which is the premier cottage industry of the province, by means of its weaving schools and demonstrations. The Department also maintained schools for wool weaving and dyeing. Small dye houses in the locality of the dyeing demonstration centres took keen interest and were benefited by following the improved processes demonstrated.

A peripatetic cane and bamboo demonstration party was organised for the first time and training in the manufacture of all kinds of cane and bamboo articles was given to workers. A head lacquerware demonstrator and an assistant demonstrator were selected and deputed for necessary training in superior types of lacquer work. On completion of their training, they gave practical demonstrations to lacquer workers of the province. Two hand weaving masters were deputed to Travancore for necessary training in coir manufacture, on completion of which a coir manufacturing school was organised for the benefit of local coir workers. An artist designer was appointed to assist hereditary craftsmen to produce saleable goods and also to find markets for the same. Ten hereditary arcraft workers were selected and granted stipends to enable them to join the Reay Art Workshop, Bombay, for training.

It is also understood that the services of experts from Orissa were requisitioned to improve the standard of manufacture of various articles from horn. A scheme for making experiments in artificial silk and another for exploring the possibilities of developing sericulture as a cottage industry were approved.

The fact that there is an extensive demand for fish although the supply is inadequate made the Bombay Government turn its attention to this problem. It came to realise that the fishermen find a ready market not only for fresh fish but also for cured fish. In order that fish might come to the market in as fresh a state as possible, it granted loans for the purchase of launches

for the rapid transport of fish from the fishing grounds to the town of Bombay.

The fishermen at the ports at which the launches operated realised better prices for their fish and took keener interest in their trade. The success of the experiment is amply borne out by the fact that Government's lead was followed by a number of private individuals going in for launches. In 1938, there were 8 vessels in the field which, between them, brought about 800,000 lbs of fish to Bombay.

The introduction of power-propelled vessels, apart from successfully fulfilling the primary need of augmenting Bombay City's supply of fish, attracted capital to the aid of the fishing industry. It was only after the appearance of the launches that two ice factories and cold storage plants were set up. Another ice factory and cold storage plant at the site where all the launches land their catch were under construction at the time of my last visit to Bombay late in 1941.

As the result of unremitting propaganda conducted by the officers of the Fishery Department under orders from the Congress Cabinet, the people concerned gradually came to realise the desirability of curing fish in accordance with the principles of hygiene. They sought the advice of the Department with regard to the ways in which this object could be fulfilled. It was stated in a *communiqué* that improved methods for curing fish were followed in over 30 yards. In 1938, nearly 2½ lakh maunds of fish were cured according to these methods.

It has to be stated further that the culture of local fresh water fishes as well as of others imported from Madras and Patna was taken in hand. At the time the Congress withdrew from office, they were breeding satisfactorily and Government was contemplating distributing the fingerlings among reliable fishermen in villages so that they might have yet another method of adding to their income.

Grants were made in every budget to the All-India Village Industries Association for carrying out approved schemes of development of rural industries. This organisation had already introduced the improved type of oil-*ghani* designed at Wardha in certain rural areas as well as bullock-driven flour mills in selected urban areas. Centres were opened, specially in places where Prohibition had been introduced, for imparting instruction in all the processes involved in the manufacture of *gur* from the sweet juice of various types of palm trees. It was hoped that this would provide remunerative work not only for the ordinary villager but also for those toddy tappers who could not any longer follow their former profession.

The Congress Government of Bombay availed itself of the services of the All-India Spinners' Association to which it loaned about Rs. 40,000 free of interest. Hand spinning and Khadi-weaving were encouraged and a marketing organisation created for selling the products. Arrangements were made for encouraging wool-weaving as a cottage industry as well as for marketing the fabric woven.

Another very welcome measure initiated by the Congress Government was its success in persuading the different cotton mills to take in boys as apprentices just after they had finished their school career. It is understood that, in 1938, about 450 such boys were taken in the cotton mills and other industries. It is gratifying to note that such a large number of boys had come to realise the futility of pursuing the ordinary type of education and were willing to qualify themselves as skilled workmen.

In order that properly qualified, trained, and meritorious young men might not be prevented from starting industries either of the cottage or of the small scale type, the Congress Government liberalised the rules governing the giving of loans for such purposes. As the result of these changes, many enterprising people applied for loans to Government. These applications were dealt with on their merits.

Madras

The Congress Government of Madras, under the energetic and wise guidance of S. J. Rajagopalacharia, made rapid strides towards industrialising the province. In addition to encouraging and developing cottage industries of different types only some of which will be mentioned hereafter, the Congress Government took various steps for encouraging medium and large scale industries. Only a reference to these must suffice for we are here concerned with cottage industries only.

A loyal follower of Mahatma Gandhi, it was natural for S. Rajagopalacharia to turn his attention first of all to encouraging *Khadi*. This was done in two ways. Seeing that the public had been induced to purchase as *Khadi* textiles which were not 100 per cent hand-spun and hand-woven, the Madras Government had recourse to legislation to put an end to this systematic deception practised by the unscrupulous dealer. It enacted the Madras Sale of Cloth Act while the *Khadi* (Name Protection) Act was extended to this province. In each of the budgets of the Congress Government, a sum of Rs. 2 lakhs was set apart for rendering special assistance to the *Khadi* industry. The All-India Spinners' Association received grants for financing the designing, manufacturing, and supplying of labour-saving implements to be used in hand-spinning and weaving. These grants also covered the expenditure involved in training men to work in the villages as instructors in improved methods.

As silk is extensively used in Madras, Government took steps to encourage sericulture and ericulture. So far as the former is concerned, arrangements were made for the production of hardy cross-breed seeds which are in great demand in those areas where silk-rearing is pursued regularly as a cottage industry. When the Congress went out of office, experiments in ericulture were nearing the final stage and a scheme for the installation of a plant to utilise *eri* cocoons was under consideration.

Financial help was also given to the woollen, blanket, and jute carpet industries carried on in rural areas. It was reported that there had been a marked improvement

in the quality of the stuff produced and also that higher prices were being received for them after the techniques had been improved with the help of these grants.

The assistance of the Wardha Training Institute was availed of by deputing certain young men to learn oil-pressing with the help of improved machinery evolved there. These returned and introduced the oil mills in villages. Still others who had received training in making hand-made paper in the same place, carried on propaganda for popularising this spare time industry in the rural areas.

As the result of investigations conducted by its officers, the Congress Government came to know that certain grasses and leaves of plants which are available in very large quantities and which had hitherto been regarded as of little economic value, are suitable for the manufacture of paper-pulp and it felt confident that when the hand-made paper industry was properly organised and when marketing facilities were made available, it would prove a very welcome means of adding to the slender income of the cottage industry worker.

When I was at Madras early in 1939, I was informed that Government had provided funds for the erection and maintenance of a small plant for the preparation of malted foods from sprouted gram and also for conducting experiments to devise a cheap plant for making sand-paper as a cottage industry. I do not, however, know what progress was made in these two industries later on.

One of the most helpful contributions in this particular direction consisted in the demonstrations given to extoddy tappers in the districts of Salem, Cudappah, and

Chittoor to train them to manufacture jaggery from palm, palmyra, and date juice. As the result of the introduction of Prohibition in these three districts, about 6,000 of these men were thrown out of work. Only a small percentage among them migrated to neighbouring districts where they continued working as toddy tappers. Government felt it its duty to provide some alternative employment for them. The Industry Department of Madras conducted a series of experiments and evolved a satisfactory process. My information is that nearly 30 Co-operative Societies were formed and the former toddy tappers had taken quite kindly to their new work which yielded them practically the same income as before with the difference that, unlike former times, not a pice out of it was wasted on toddy.

With an eye to benefiting the fishermen who form an important section of the population on both the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, the Congress Government of Madras adopted three plans. From certain experiments conducted at Tanur, the experts evolved a cheap and easy process for the extraction of shark liver oil which is used extensively for medicinal purposes. Sharks are found in fairly large numbers and are very frequently caught. Officers appointed by Government for the purpose demonstrated at all important fish-curing yards this method which can be easily followed under village conditions. Then again, sardine oil which is the commonest and cheapest fish oil produced in this province, was found to contain vitamin A. It is of great commercial importance as it can be used both for food

and for medicinal purposes. But, up to the present, the methods used have been wasteful. Government made arrangements to teach fishermen the economical and easy method evolved by its experts. Lastly, in order to teach better methods of fish-curing, Government opened four fish-curing yards on the Malabar coast. Instead of importing the salt from Tuticorin on the east coast, it arranged to manufacture salt on the spot. It was expected that the workers and proprietors of fish-curing yards of which there are fairly large numbers, would take advantage of the facilities created and themselves use as well as popularise the cheap and efficient methods adopted in Government yards.

It is interesting to note the different ways in which the Congress Government of Madras was encouraging the development of industry. In order that the different industries might be manned by qualified men, a Technological Diploma Examination Board was set up. This conducts the examination of all students studying in technological institutions and grants diplomas only to those who possess the necessary qualifications, it being expected that only these would be employed in factories etc. Courses in ceramics, leather working, casting and metal work were either enlarged or started. It was hoped that students, after completing their training, would be able to set up small establishments of their own in or near their own homes.

In order to give financial assistance to persons carrying on cottage and village industries, Government amended the Madras State Aid to Industries Act and began

making liberal grants to various persons. I myself know of loans granted to persons engaged in making toys, buttons, etc. I was also told that loans were given for reviving silk spinning and cotton weaving.

Recognising that cottage industries can compete successfully with machine-made products only where the marketing organisation is such as to completely cut out or greatly reduce middlemen's profits, and also that commercial museums offer an easy means of putting the producer into touch with the buyer or the consumer, the Madras Government established a Central Museum at the capital of the province with museums in the different districts. It cannot be said that all the districts had museums or that every one of the district museums had a complete collection of the specimens of all arts and crafts practised in it. What was encouraging was that an earnest effort was made to organise industry and specially the cottage industries. There does not seem to be much doubt that all these steps are calculated to have the effect of opening up a large market for the products.

Lastly, in order that Government might, as far as possible, come to the rescue of cottage industries, orders were passed that, as far as practicable, all its requirements as well as those of local bodies and aided institutions should be met from articles manufactured in India. The purchase of jail-made articles was also made compulsory for all departments requiring such articles. This policy was greatly appreciated as it provided a steady market for some at least of the products of cottage industries.

Conclusion

It is an undeniable fact that, in certain directions, whether we like it or not, we shall have to adopt large scale production methods and start factories. But in order to maintain equilibrium between man and machine, we should try to encourage industries which will employ comparatively large numbers of workers. This may not be ideal from the orthodox standpoint, but it is sound sense from the point of view of the statesman who thinks it his duty as well as his privilege to look to the greatest good of the greatest number. For this purpose, it may be necessary to grant protection to our cottage industries but we should not, I hold, be afraid to take this step to safeguard the interests of our poorer brethren.

It is admitted that, at least in the initial stages, protection in the case of products of cottage industries practically amounts to the imposition of indirect taxation on the consumers of these goods. But this need not necessarily be a permanent feature of our economic life. Cheap power harnessed to cottage industries must ultimately lower the cost of production and their starting in different parts of India must engender competition in our internal market which must inevitably lead to a reduction in their retail prices.

Only the other day, Beatrice and Sidney Webb in their work on Soviet Russia pointed out that, in spite of the marvellous economic development of that country, more than 50 per cent of its internal needs are met by the products of cottage industries carried on under the

cartel or co-operative system. We should remember that human values are very precious and no man who calls himself an Indian and a patriot should grudge paying high prices when he knows that, by doing so, he is saving his brothers and sisters from starvation, nakedness, disease, and premature death.

CHAPTER VI

CONGRESS AND THE PROLETARIAT

I well remember how, in the past, the one criticism, and it was a just criticism, levelled with deadly effect against the Indian National Congress was that it had no touch with the masses and that the demands for political power it put forward from time to time had no popular sanction behind them. Reactionary British officialdom was always prepared not only to defy it but to treat its views with the utmost contempt. Things have altered since that time and this change we owe to Mahatma Gandhi. His greatest achievement in the political field has been that he has succeeded in converting a political movement confined to a limited number of intellectuals into a mass movement.

Providence has endowed Gandhiji with the valuable gift of divining the popular sentiment at any particular moment, and a rare statesmanship teaching him how to use it to the best advantage of our motherland. The conversion of a small into a mass movement was possible only because he insisted on the needs and demands of the hungry, naked, and sick millions of India and he did this as no one else before had done it. The middle class was there already and this brought the Kisan (agriculturist) and the Mazdoor (industrial worker) inside the Congress.

Something has to be said here about the attitude of the Congress towards class organisations like Kishan Sabhas

and Trade Unions, primarily interested in the welfare and advancement of the classes they represent. As regards the former it has been held, and held correctly, that

The Congress is predominantly a political organisation representing the urge of all classes of Indians towards national freedom. (It therefore) thinks and acts mainly on the political plane.

Such a statement coming from Congress leadership naturally raises the question as to why the Congress concerns itself so much with economic matters. The answer was given by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru (*Eighteen Months in India*, p. 214) when he said,

The Congress because of its close touch with the masses, because indeed it is by far the biggest mass organisation in the country, inevitably begins to think and act in terms of the economic grievances and disabilities of the masses, that is the workers, peasants, and others.

These have joined the Congress and given it their political support because they believe that the attainment of political freedom only can lead to the removal of their economic disabilities. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that the Congress has won their support by its political programme. In the opinion of Pundit Nehru,

It has done so by its magnificent record of service and sacrifice, and by its direct approach to the masses and its increasing economic orientation, which is understood by the masses more than the purely political objective.

This fact, however, does not prevent the Congress from acting as a national organisation in which all classes such as landlords, industrialists, bankers, businessmen, the higher and lower strata of the middle class, and the proletariat, urban and rural, find representation. While, in the political sphere, it voices the demand of Indians of all

groups with divergent economic interests for freedom, in the economic sphere, it cannot, so long as it retains its present representative character, fight for the class interests of the rural and urban working classes. All that may be expected from it is that it will hold the balance even between conflicting economic groups, and strive to be just to all. This explains the decisions its leaders have given on occasions when their intervention has been called for and which, because they have been characterised by a judicial spirit, have found the hearty approval of neither the capitalistic nor the proletariat element.

Kishan Organisations And The Congress

In order to understand why the Kishan movement has achieved such importance in the political sphere, we have to realise the conditions under which the peasant of India has been living for generations. All his wealth consists of the cheap metal jewellery of his womenfolk, a few brass utensils when he happens to possess any, at most a couple of half-starved, undersized bullocks and a leaky hut. He is half-starved and his diet is extremely monotonous. Vegetables and animal food whether in the form of fish or meat, he may taste only on rare occasions. If he has milch cattle, he has to sell his dairy products. He is clad in a few rags, and has little protection against the bitter chill of winter.

The peasant has to work from morning to night during the sowing and harvesting seasons and to remain hungry and idle for the rest of the year. Schools are far off and

his children have to do what they can to increase the earnings of the family. Medical relief and sanitation he has none. Living under such circumstances, it is no wonder that the average expectation of life is not more than 23 years as compared with that of Great Britain, which rules us and where it is not less than 48 years.

When the crop is ready for harvesting, the money-lender attaches it or, in order to satisfy his landlord, the Kishan is forced to sell it without being able to wait for better prices. He starves and is forced to borrow to keep body and soul together and to carry on agricultural operations. Recognising all these factors which are working against him, the Royal Agricultural Commission stated

No one desires to witness a continuation of a system under which people are born in debt, live in debt and die in debt, passing on their burden to those who follow.

But this is inevitable in view of the fact that the Kishan's earnings are very low. A Government Committee of Enquiry in 1931, stated that the average income of an agriculturist worked out at a little over £3 a year which means less than two pence a day. It is not even enough to feed a man. How much can he save out of it to pay his creditor? The result is semi-starvation, lack of resistive capacity to disease, and early death.

Things have come to such a pass that one who produces grain starves, and the grower of cotton goes naked though he supplies not only the cotton mills of India but also those of Japan.

This brings us to the question of the exact position of the Zemindar in the economy of Indian life and his relations

with the Kisan. There is evidence to show that, in ancient India, the land belonged to the village community, and also that during the days of Mussalman political predominance, the Zemindar was nothing but a tax collector. Under the British, however, he has become a landlord. There is more than enough proof which would justify any fair-minded man to hold that, with honourable exceptions, the landlords as a class have abused their position of privilege. Exorbitant rents have been exacted by many of them most unjustifiably. I have heard of cases, specially in Upper India, where tenants have been mercilessly beaten, movable property attached which is not at all uncommon, and even the women-folk treated in a disgraceful manner, all in order that the Kisan might be compelled to pay the dues of his landlord to the very last pie. The natural consequence has been a bitter class antagonism between the Zemindar and the Kisan.

Here, as elsewhere, Mahatma Gandhi took the lead. The Satyagraha campaigns carried on under his leadership at Champaran in Bihar and Bardoli in Gujerat put heart into the Indian peasant. To-day, one very rarely meets the typical fatalistic down-trodden Kisan in any of the provinces where Congress Government had been set up. He has come to realise his strength when properly organised.

Thus in August, 1937, about half a lakh peasants from all over Bihar marched to Patna with red flags and Congress flags to make their demands. In November, the same year, there was another demonstration made by one lakh Kisans. In the U. P., in February, 1938, 60,000 peasants marched

to Lucknow and dispersed only after they had been addressed by Premier Pant and Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. None of these was marked by rowdyism in any form which surely proves how these people have imbibed a sense of discipline.

An Agrarian programme had been called for at the Lucknow Session of the Congress in 1936, but in 1937, when the Congress met at Faizpur, a village in the Bombay Presidency, a 13-point comprehensive scheme for the amelioration of the peasantry was agreed to. The one thing which stands out is that, in this programme, no reference is made to the abolition of the Zemindari system.

During the elections to the Provincial Legislative Assemblies, Leftists devoted themselves to the task of organising Kisan Sabhas both in the U. P., and in Bihar. In the U. P., the Congress found supporters chiefly among the lower middle class and in Bihar among the landholding classes. The organising of Kisan Sabhas in the two provinces is significant as it opened a new chapter in the history of democracy in India where, for the first time, we find the poorest classes taking an active interest in politics through the medium of their own class organisations. When the Congress came into office, the peasant expected a new Heaven and a Earth at once, for had he not sent his own men to the assemblies ?

When his hopes did not meet with immediate fulfilment people, by no means friendly to the Congress Ministers, were ready to exploit the Kisan. He was instructed not to pay his rent and thus to turn the weapon which he had

learnt to use from the Congress, against it. He was warned that if he did so, before the laws were altered, he could be ejected by the landlord and no one, not even the Ministers, could help him. It was at this time that there was some wild talk about liquidating landlordism without compensation and this, too, I believe, was a suggestion put forward merely to embarrass the Congress cabinets. The Kisans apparently did not care to remember that the Congress contains all elements from extreme right to extreme left which have combined for the attainment of a definite aim—the economic and political freedom of India. The Congress is not thus in a position to enact purely socialistic measures or to attempt the liquidation of the landlord class—a policy to which the Congress had never pledged itself. With an increase in the tempo of the Kisan movement, and the consequent pressure exerted on it by its followers, *the leaders of the peasant agitation grew impatient at the slowness of the Congress pace which they ascribed to the influence exerted on the cabinets by the land-owning class.* Some colour was lent to this view by the so-called inadequacy of the relief afforded to the peasants by the legislative measures put through by the Congress cabinets.

There undoubtedly appeared a certain amount of bitterness over this difference of opinion. Those who are not friendly to our national organisation would like to see an ever-widening breach between the Rightist party which had supported the ministers in all Congress provinces and the Kisan group. This would mean loss of influence and popularity and was expected to lead ultimately to the

fall of Congress Ministers. Some of them even anticipated that the matter would be thrashed out in the Haripura Session and an irreparable breach eventuate between the two wings of the Congress. What actually happened was quite different. A resolution was passed which laid down the principle that peasant organisations must regard themselves as subsidiary to the Congress. The Kisan leaders reiterated their loyalty to the Congress ideals and their adherence to its programme. The Congress Committees were requested to redouble their efforts to improve the condition of the Kisans. In this way, a crisis was averted. In the meantime, legislative measures beneficial to the peasants, but not calculated to liquidate the Zemindari system, were passed in Bihar, and the U. P. Ministry, before its resignation, was also proposing to do something similar for its own Kisans.

It is difficult to say whether the Kisan movement will ultimately go against the Congress because of its unwillingness to enact expropriatory laws. As yet, there are not a sufficient number of the proper type of leaders to form a Government. I do not also believe that India, conservative as it is by nature, will favour extreme measures. But we can all well appreciate, and sympathise with, the eagerness with which the peasants are dreaming of a change for the better in their condition and it is not at all unnatural for them to look for it from those of their countrymen who had held out such hopes to them in the event of their coming into political power.

Industrial Labour And The Congress

During the last war, imports were restricted as shipping was engaged in transporting troops, materials, and food. There appeared an insistent demand for manufactured goods inside, and of raw materials outside, India. The result was a vast increase of Indian capitalism. Factories sprang up all over India and the demand for labour increased by leaps and bounds. Workmen acquired self-confidence, became vocal, and made their demands, putting pressure on their employers by organising strikes. The influenza epidemic of 1918, which caused 8 million deaths in India thinned the ranks of labour and the demand for it keener. Capitalists were making immense profits ; for instance more than a dozen large Jute mills in Bengal paid dividends of 200 per cent. and over. Employers, in view of the immense profits they were making, had no desire that their output should be diminished and therefore made concessions, generally in the form of what are called dearness allowances.

Then came the depression and a falling-off in the demand for labour. Efforts were made to reduce the remuneration of labour which led to a number of strikes. The attempt to "rationalise" in Bombay, in 1928, led to a strike which involved 65,000 workmen. In the strikes which took place during this period, the police had occasionally to resort not only to repressive measures carried on, according to its critics, vindictively, but also to firing. The natural consequence was that nearly all the unions came under Leftist influence. It was at this time that the Royal

Commission on Labour was appointed. The report of this Commission has thrown a flood of light on the condition of industrial labour in India. The wages paid, the housing conditions, the exploitation practised, make it a harrowing account to read. Here and there, and, specially in the larger and better organised industries, there have undoubtedly been improvements but things are nearly as bad as before in the case of the smaller industries. Legislation aimed at ameliorating the condition of labour has been passed in some provinces, but it has not satisfied the people sought to be benefited.

There has undoubtedly been a closer co-operation between labourers and the Congress the last few years than ever before. This has been due to the growth of radicalism inside its ranks. The Congress manifesto had stated that

in regard to industrial workers, the policy of the Congress is to secure for them a standard of living, hours of work and conditions of labour...suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workmen, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment and the right to strike for the protection of their interests.

The undertaking, naturally not very definite, was regarded by industrial labour as the goal which would be attained as soon as the Congress was in power. Therefore when it assumed office in 1937, they thought that their troubles were over or nearly over. But they were greatly disappointed when S. J. Rajendra Prasad said publicly,

So long as Congress is not in full power, it must adopt the line of ameliorative programme...to embark on a radical programme till that power is achieved is hazardous. It will introduce class conflicts which would be harmful to the national movement in more ways than one.

The only concession workers received immediately was the enjoyment of greater facilities than had existed formerly for ventilating their grievances and this they considered utterly inadequate.

In October, 1937, there was a joint conference of the Labour Sub-Committee of the Working Committee of the Congress, of Congress Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries of Labour in Calcutta. The President of the Kisan Sabha and of the All-India Trades Union Congress were present by invitation. A tentative programme of work was drawn up which, it was hoped, would be implemented in the Congress provinces through "administrative or legislative action." But this was regarded as disappointing by the Trades Union Congress. It held that the Congress was yielding too much to capitalism and was, to a certain extent, sacrificing the interests of the workers. The employers also were equally critical of the Congress policy. When the report of the Cawnpore Enquiry Committee was published, capitalists said that the findings had been unduly influenced by the Union, the members of which carried great weight in Congress circles.

Cawnpore has always been a storm centre and the U. P. Congress Government was compelled to have recourse to the much hated Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code. In Bombay and Sholapur also, police action had to be used against demonstrators. This gave rise to much bitter criticism from the Left. It was also suggested that, on many occasions, strikes had been instigated with the sole purpose of embarrassing and discrediting Congress Governments. It has been reported that certain members

of the Muslim League went so far as to suggest that communists had been utilised by Congress Governments to bring about strikes which might justify the starting of a campaign against British employers. I have very good reasons to believe, however, that prominent Congress leaders have been greatly distressed by the way in which the labour extremists have launched strikes. For instance, in Cawnpore, the labour leaders were requested to induce the workers to hold their hands till the publication of the report of the Enquiry Committee. Interested persons, however, instigated the strikers to carry on their objectionable activities.

Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru who, at the Lucknow Congress in 1936, had invited the Trade Unions and Kisan organisations to co-operate with the Congress to achieve the freedom of India, appreciated the embarrassing situation created by the adoption of this objectionable tactics and, as early as September, 1937, said that

The workers and their leaders know well that the Congress ministers are friendly to them and wish to help them in every way. Circumstances beyond their control may prevent them today from going as far as they would like to. But for the first time in its history, the workers' movement has friendly provincial governments in six provinces and the chances of remedying some of its ills and developing its strength and organisation. They will injure their causes by embarrassing them and withholding their co-operation from them.

The Congress Ministers, as was to be expected, were being pulled in two directions, by capital which attempted to prevent them from fulfilling the Congress pledges which threatened their profits and by labour which demanded immediate redress of its legitimate grievances. It is to be regretted that the latter grew very impatient and was

not willing to wait till such time as the Congress was in a position to satisfy it.

The sympathy of Congress Governments with the point of view of labour is well-known. The U. P. Government, for instance, drafted two bills, one dealing with trade disputes and the other with conditions of work of employees in shops and commercial houses. They resigned before the bills could be introduced in the Assembly. The Bombay Government also implemented labour legislation in the form of the Industrial Disputes Act and carried it through in spite of very strenuous opposition offered from the Leftist group.

On the 29th May, 1939, Premier Pant discussed the difficulties of workers with their leaders at Cawnpore and, in his reply, criticised their methods and pointed out how these were leading to the shifting of industries to the Indian States. These, he said, would have been opened in Cawnpore if labour unrest had not been such a characteristic of the premier industrial centre of the U. P. In his opinion, the prosperity of Cawnpore was being seriously jeopardised by incessant labour troubles and it was likely that the prosperity of the entire province would be adversely affected if these became a permanent feature of the life of that city.

Later on, the U. P. Congress Government made it known to the labour leaders of Cawnpore that, under no circumstances, would they permit the peace of that city to be disturbed by lightning strikes or by speeches calculated to incite violence or class hatred. It condemned the lightning strike involving over 4,000 workers at the

New Victoria Mills, which had commenced from about the 2nd May, 1939, and made it absolutely clear that, while peaceful picketing would not be interfered with, no one would be allowed to obstruct public highways or to deprive citizens of their civil liberty by preventing egress from or ingress into private premises.

The attitude of the Madras Government was clearly enunciated by the Minister-in-charge of Industries and Labour speaking at Coimbatore on the 17th May, 1939, at the Annual General Meeting of the Southern Indian Millowners' Association. He said

The greatest desire of the Government is that they should not be called upon unnecessarily to interfere in the relations between employers and workers. If any labour dispute has culminated in a strike, in spite of attempts on the part of employers, workers, and the Government to prevent it, both sides must respect each other's rights, privileges and responsibilities. If they do not and go out of their way, then the Government is bound to intervene in the interests of Law and Order and good Government.

The Labour policy of the Madras Government was made clear in their communique of October, 1937. They stood for the encouragement of trade unions and preferred settlement of disputes between workers and employers without external intervention. At the same time, they were always prepared to adopt strong measures if either of the parties was "unduly unjust or unreasonable." They held that the civil rights both of the employers and the employees have to be equally respected. While peaceful picketing would not be interfered with, it must not degenerate into intimidation which would compel Government to give protection to the employers. If an unreasonable spirit was seen in the rank either of capital or labour giving

rise to apprehensions of violence, Government might even have to suspend civil rights by an order under law directed against one or other of the parties for preserving peace. The policy of the Madras Government was

to hold the scales even as between employers and workers and their desire was to justly protect the interests of both parties and specially of industry as a whole,

These instances taken from three provinces where industrial disputes appeared after the Congress assumed office, prove the impartiality of the attitude of our All-India national organisation as regards this particular problem. These three provinces are separated from one another by many hundreds of miles and yet they followed a similar policy—a policy which found approval with neither capital nor labour. This fact alone is sufficient proof that they were trying to do their duty impartially by both the parties to industrial disputes.

The different Congress Ministers were not successful in immediately creating good feelings among employers and their workers or in ensuring the peaceful and amicable settlement of labour disputes in every case. It is only too likely that the labour movement will continue to gather strength and that the gradual spread of literacy will help its growth. Much of the success which may hereafter crown the struggle carried on by workers will depend on the unity and discipline, the sanity and the discretion of the labour leaders.

It required no small amount of courage on the part of the Congress Governments concerned to go against the opinions of the more vocal and active Leftist element.

inside the Congress and yet, undeterred by internal differences, they went on their own way and tried to serve the interests of our motherland in the manner which seemed best in their eyes. This one fact alone should inspire the confidence of all parties in the leadership of the Congress.

In conclusion, I should like to point out that the perpetuation of the objectionable circumstances under which workers are living in India to-day is a distinct menace to the British workers. The raising of tariff walls and the desire to profit by establishing factories in India, are attracting foreign capital, in large amounts to India. The cheap supply of labour from an almost inexhaustible source is also very welcome to those foreign capitalists who desire large returns for their investments. It follows that those who are agitating for a higher standard for Indian labour are, in a manner, serving the interests of the British labourer. A free, contented, and prosperous India will need experts and machinery for a long time to come and where should she get them from except from a country to which she has been bound for centuries? It is therefore that the labour movement in India, so long as it does not assume a subversive complexion, should find favour with labour in the West.

Our Duty As Indians

These are two only of the many problems our brothers in the different Congress Ministries faced and, on the whole, faced boldly and solved as satisfactorily as possible with the slender resources at their command, always.

keeping in view the undesirability of introducing too sudden changes.

Sir Harcourt Butler who served in India for thirty-eight long years, thirteen of which were spent as Governor of the United Provinces and Burma in his book *Insistent India*, written just before the Government of India Act, 1935, became law, while referring to the granting of responsible Government to India said,

Parliament will be confronted by the difficulty of finding any party in India which can, in the language of the market, deliver the goods.

This, to the regret of National India, has almost invariably been the attitude of the foreign bureaucracy towards our political aspirations. And yet, Sir Harcourt knew Pundit Motilal Nehru whom he has called his friend in his book. It is also equally certain that he knew Jawaharlal and those prominent members of the Congress party who were jailed by his Government and who, till the other day, were administering that province successfully in spite of difficulties, many of which they had inherited from their predecessors. What Sir Harcourt thought impossible has become an actual fact. And it was so because men fired by Congress ideals were at the helm of affairs. Let us thank God that He has given us such leaders not merely in the United Provinces but also in every part of India and let us do what we can to ensure the success of all their endeavours to raise the status of our Motherland and to benefit our masses.

CHAPTER VII

CONGRESS AND LABOUR UNREST

The conditions of industrial labour in India are, in certain directions, worse than those of the cultivators. While it is true that there have appeared certain improvements in them as the result of the Royal Labour Commission of 1931, and of the partial acceptance of the suggestions of the International Labour Organisation, the legal limits of hours of labour continue to be 10 in the day and 54 in the week. Miners may work up to 54 hours in the week and 10 hours in the day above ground or 9 below. Women and young persons are no longer permitted to work at night and the underground work of women in mines has been abolished though revived under the pressure of war. Striking as these improvements are, much remains as yet unaccomplished in the spheres of insurance against accident, safety devices, inspection, maternity benefits, methods of recruiting labour, wage-levels, and similar other matters.

Housing conditions are, however, the worst feature of the situation. I have known single rooms without verandahs, measuring nine feet square used by a whole family for cooking, living, and sleeping. Occasionally, I have come across a somewhat larger room with a flimsy curtain across the middle for accommodating two families. Here ventilation is appalling. Sanitation is primitive, and the supply of water totally inadequate. This explains the high infant death-rate, the toll taken by preventable disease, the

drunkenness and the immorality. No further particulars are given here as I have dealt with them in detail elsewhere.

All this has continued mainly because industrial workers are, for the most part, illiterate and disorganised, and therefore unable to put up a fight for their better treatment. Things have changed within recent years so that strikes are more common now than they were formerly. In nearly all cases, they reflect the demand for higher wages and improved living conditions which is all to the good, for the standard of living is miserably low. Whatever success has crowned the efforts put forth is mainly due to the appearance, in a more or less crude form, of trade unionism among workers.

The Congress Attitude To Trade Unionism

The Congress has always admitted the right of industrial labour to organise itself. Nor has it ever even remotely suggested that the masses by joining the Congress forfeit the privilege of having separate working class organisations of their own. On the other hand, from the statements made by its leaders and resolutions accepted by its executive, it can be easily shown that not only is this regarded as a fundamental right but also that it has encouraged, at least in theory, the formation of working class organisations. This is so because the Congress is aware that trade unionism is the inevitable companion of modern industry and that, by its very nature, it must extend with the growth of large scale industry. Even if the Congress had succeeded in inducing every worker

employed in organised industries operating all over India to join it formally, which, admittedly, it has not done, it would continue to retain its fundamentally political character and would still lay the largest amount of emphasis on its political work. It could not, under any circumstances, function as a trade union the primary concern of which is to deal with the problems of workers. Doing so would convert it into something quite different from what it has hitherto purported to be, and also because it has among its members equally large numbers of people who, not being workers, would never permit it. All that the Congress would expect from trade unions with a nationalist outlook would be that, without being subject to official Congress control in their internal affairs, they must follow the lead given by the Congress in political matters.

That this has been the accepted policy of the Congress is evident from what Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, regarded as the most prominent of its Leftist leaders, said on the 28th June, 1937, in his statement entitled "The Congress and Labour and Peasant Organisations." His words were as follows,

In economic matters, and those relating to workers' grievances, the (trade) union can have whatever programme it chooses, even though this may be in advance of the Congress programme.

He went on to say that while Congressmen in their individual capacity could be members of trade unions or give them their advice, Congress Committees *as such* should never make any attempt to control them. This explains the two-way assault to which the Congress Governments were exposed whenever capital and labour

came into inflict as happened in practically every province controlled by it during the period it enjoyed power. The Congress had to insist on justice being done to the labourers thus incurring the hostility of the employing classes who saw a cutting into their profits if they were compelled to make larger concessions to their workers. The latter, again, did not feel particularly pleased when they found that they had not yet attained the New Earth and the New Heaven to which they had looked forward when they sent their own men to the legislatures. And they got disappointed beyond measure when they found to their surprise that their lawless activities were put down as firmly and as promptly as during the bad days of the old regime though the wiser among them did not fail to notice that an honest effort was made to use the minimum amount of compulsion.

Strikes And Their Reasons

According to the Employers' Federation of India, on the average 96,64,000 working days were lost every year in India in the last decade through strikes. These affected about 650,000 workers. These strikes, some sporadic and others prolonged, were not confined to a particular province or provinces but were distributed all over India. It is, of course, true that they may have been due, at least partly, to the new consciousness of power conferred on the masses and that the enlargement of franchise and the introduction of provincial autonomy have naturally led to a demand for better standards of living.

Every patriotic Indian cannot but deplore the immense loss due to strikes. These must have caused reduced output and unemployment among a class of people who are probably the least able to stand the economic strain put on their resources by industrial disputes. They must also have affected the prosperity of the industries concerned directly and the prosperity of the country as a whole indirectly.

Leaving aside the direct loss in the shape of wages, there is also what, by analogy, may be called "invisible" loss. This takes the form of bitterness on both sides occasionally leading to victimisation and sabotage. Even if such regrettable effects do not manifest themselves, we have, in nearly all cases, a general slackening in the tempo of production, defiance of authority, and a general indiscipline. The attention of the public was drawn to this matter in the report drawn up by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then Congress President and Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru on the dispute between the Tata Iron and Steel Company and the Tata Workers' Union.

It cannot be denied that indiscipline is a growing menace in our industrial organisation. This is a very serious handicap, specially in the case of small and medium size industries in which the capital is small and resistive powers weak. More often than not, these do not enjoy any kind of protection. Any dislocation specially if it is timed in such a way as to interfere with their activities when they have to work under high pressure to fulfil contracts which do not come with much frequency in their way, is not only unfortunate but

sometimes disastrous. I know of more than one small engineering concern which has been practically ruined in this way.

As I understand it, the genuine strike is for the redress of grievances regarding wages, hours of work, treatment, or for improving working conditions. If that is so, it should ordinarily be capable of amicable settlement. It is lack of education which renders it practically impossible for the labourer to realize that he must share both in the prosperity and adversity of the industry in which he is engaged. He cannot, as yet, appreciate fully the difficulties of industrial capital in India faced by foreign competition on the one hand and by increasing burdens in the shape of new taxes on the other. It must, however, be said in fairness that though there has been change of heart among employers and, as a whole, though industrial labour today is better off than in the past, it has not always shared in the prosperity which has followed to the extent it deserves.

The tragedy of industrial labour in India has been that it is illiterate and unintelligent. It has yet failed to understand that the strike is its last resort and that this method of ventilating grievances should be adopted only when every other means of obtaining redress has failed. On the whole, it has not as yet been able to appreciate fully the possibilities of collective bargaining through well-organized trade unions. And it is to the interest of both capital and labour that the growth and development of strong and healthy trade unionism should be encouraged in all possible ways. Matters must be adjusted in such a

manner that there will not be even the slightest suggestion of the employer having any influence on its internal working. I do not for a moment suggest that this has happened on any thing like a large scale, but what I desire to emphasise is that nothing should be done which may have the effect of rousing the distrust of labour.

Mrs. Rameshwari Nehru in a speech she made at Madras late in July, 1939, said that she knew of one place where people were paid to picket a mill. The money collected for the purpose was paid to the picketers. "Such strikes," she observed, "are bound to fail and they only end in disorganizing society. They do no good to workers and vitiate the relations between the employers and the employed". Such things are possible only from lack of healthy trade unionism.

Selfish Labour Leadership

Every one who has come into contact with industrial labour has to admit, however unwillingly, that, at least now and again, the cordial relations which ordinarily exist between employer and employee have been, and are being, disturbed by selfish outsiders who seek to exploit their position either for financial reasons or for the sake of notoriety. At the same time, let us not forget the very valuable services rendered to workers by outside leadership of which the case of Mr. N. M. Joshi is a good example. The pity of it is that, whereas labour leaders like Mr. Joshi are disposed to adjust industrial disputes peacefully, labour leaders of the objectionable type do not welcome such settlements.

They prefer to exacerbate feelings and to encourage strikes for one or other of the purposes mentioned above.

No one would describe Mr. Gulzari Lall, Parliamentary Secretary to the late Minister for Labour, Bombay, as one inimical to the interests of labour or partial to those of capital. And yet, while referring to the undesirable activities of selfish labour leaders, he was compelled to observe that cases had come under his notice where an offer of, say, a 15 per cent increase in the wages recommended for acceptance by reasonable leaders of the type of Mr. Joshi, was turned down by selfish leaders. He analysed the situation thus created in the following way. The selfish leader says to himself that if the offer of a 15 per cent increase in the wages was accepted, the leader who had recommended it would come to be regarded as *the* leader and then where would he be. He would, therefore, press for an increase of say 20 per cent which, he was aware, the industry could not bear and which could never be granted. As extremism flourishes on ignorance, he would be hailed as the true friend of workers. Negotiations would break down and a strike follow. He would be in the lime-light and, in addition to the notoriety he seeks, he would, if he is selfish and knew how to play his cards, profit financially.

In these circumstances, it seems desirable that something should be done to check the activities of such mischievous or rather dangerous men. The future of Indian industry is indeed very dark if no restraint is placed on men of this type. I would go even so far as to suggest that the work of the National Planning Committee in which

every province is taking so great interest would be largely stultified unless we can ensure peaceful conditions of work.

Let us admit that, in many cases, strikes have been engineered by selfish leaders and by designing politicians. But surely if the grievances complained of are genuine and, in a majority of cases they must have been so or else where was the necessity of removing them, the unworthiness of the leaders can, by no means, be regarded as a justification for retaining them. When the workers realise that without the application of pressure, grievances are not ordinarily removed, one can hardly blame them if, in the absence of leaders among themselves which again is due to lack of education, they come to rely on selfish and interested politicians to fight their battles.

I am not prepared to acknowledge that, in each and every case, strikes are engineered by outside influence or that, in every case, the leaders encourage them for political or selfish ends. To decide whether such a view is correct or not, one must be omniscient. I do some social service and religious work in a very humble way among the Indian Christian jute mill workers in suburban Calcutta and I can, without stepping outside the bounds of truth, state that there are many cases of petty tyranny and exploitation which, by their very nature, can never come under the notice of the *burra sahibs*. In many instances, strikes represent the flaring up of the passions of ignorant men who have suffered long from petty tyranny, redress of which appears an impossibility with them. In fact, I have myself found it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to

make my people listen to reason when once their feelings are excited. At the same time, I shall not deny that strikes have been utilized, now and again, for purely political ends.

The Appeal Of Communism And Ways To Meet It

Having but little sympathy with communism with its anti-religious attitude, its appeal to violence and class hatred, and its declared policy and no encouraging insurrection and bloodshed on a mass scale and no personal contact with communists, it is impossible for me to say how far these strikes are due to communistic influence and assistance. I do not, however, have much doubt that communism is being preached both among agricultural and industrial labour and the only reason for its appeal for them is their misery. It further seems to me that unrest among the agriculturists is primarily due to uneconomic holdings, the unremunerative prices of agricultural products, and the landlessness of many persons who, by heredity and training, are not qualified to earn their living in any other way.

It is admitted that communism may be fought through legislation and that the more law-abiding, and the better-off section, whether European or Indian, has the right to seek its protection. This, however, is only a palliative. There ought to be sound counter-propaganda, so that the insidious propaganda in favour of communism may be checked. Industrial workers must be made to realize the economic futility of strikes and specially that it should be a weapon to be used only when all other

methods of settling disputes have failed. But even this I do not consider enough. To kill communism, we must see that the poverty and the economic uncertainty which are most favourable to its propagation are fought as far as possible.

May I also point out that half the battle would be won if once we could get intelligent workers capable of appreciating the difficulties of the employer and also convince him that it is ultimately to his interest to see that his men are afforded some facilities for acquiring a certain measure of education? I can never forget the rebuff I received from the Scotch manager of a jute mill somewhere in Howrah district who stated that he would never give any chance to literate Indian Christian workers in his jute mill because he was afraid that they would act as leaders in any trouble that might arise. He failed to see that literate workers, provided they are sufficiently large in number and are really intelligent, are likely to be more amenable to reason than illiterate workers whose passions are easily roused and who can be more easily exploited than their comparatively educated brethren.

A general grievance with industrial workers is the want of regular employment. When I was in the Central Provinces and Madras, I heard demands made for unemployment relief and provision for old age. In these places, improved housing accomodation has been provided, co-operative societies introduced, schools and welfare centres started. These are making an appeal to workers and I am looking forward to the time when, as in the

countries of the West, we shall have a class of skilled industrial labour sufficiently intelligent and educated to enter into collective agreements with employers. I am not such a visionary as to imagine that all the demands of labour can be met at once or even in the near future ; but I must say that though there are almost insurmountable difficulties in the way, these will have to be overcome and also that till they are overcome, industrial disputes will occur from time to time.

The difficulties of employers have to be explained to their men and hence the necessity of having tactful labour officers everywhere. Efficient machinery for arbitration has to be set up. This has been done at Ahmedabad under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi with most satisfactory results. Let me quote the figures which I have been able to gather. I am sorry that they are not up-to-date. There are three principale centres of the textile industry in Western India. These are Bombay, Sholapur, and Ahmedabad. In the eight years from 1926 to 1933, the time lost in Bombay was 32 million days, in Sholapur over 1 million and in Ahmedabad 13,800 only. In terms of wages, Bombay was a loser to the extent of over 427 lakhs, Sholapur about 10 lakhs and Ahmedabad less than 2 lakhs. The success achieved at Ahmedabad is very largely due to the influence which Mahatma Gandhi exercises over labour and the workers abide by his findings because they have absolute reliance on his sense of fairness and justice. It is for the employers to establish a similar machinery in their mills and factories all over India.

Relationship Between The Employer And The Employee

Of course, industrialists must change their attitude towards labour and, above all, forget to regard it merely as a factor of production to be used and cast aside when no longer required. They must remember that labourers, though poor and ignorant, are, none the less, human beings with human feelings and human wants and also that they have the right to claim subsistence wages, if nothing else. It is therefore that there should be more intimate contact between the employer and the employee than in the past. A constructive policy for the amelioration of labour with due regard to the welfare and prosperity of the industries concerned has to be formulated and given effect to systematically. It is only then that labour will come to realise that it is a partner with capital in industrial enterprise in which both are equally interested and, it is only under these circumstances, that the problem of industrial unrest can be solved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

One of the requisites for the development and prosperity of industry in India is industrial peace. There has been injustice against labour in the past; even today labour does not always get even-handed justice in every case. But mutual recriminations or wanton and irresponsible attempts at the disturbance of the relationship between capital and labour do not appear likely to improve the condition of the latter at a rate more rapid than what may be expected to normally result from collective

bargaining carried on through the agency of strong, well-organised, and healthy trade unionism.

Let me also, in this connection, draw the attention of my readers to the wise advice given by Sir William Benthall to European captains of industry when he spoke at the conference of the Associated Chambers of Commerce in India in December, 1938. He said :

The more the management is able to establish contact with the workers, the better is it able to diagnose what are the workers' real troubles, and so to effect that fundamental contentment which if it exists, is the surest safeguard against industrial unrest It cannot be too often stressed that justice and a fair deal for labour is not only the only right but also the only safe policy for employers to follow.

In a previous part of this chapter, I have made an attempt to analyse what I consider the legitimate causes of industrial unrest suggesting ways of removing them and establishing peace and harmony between the employer and the employee. I am more than willing to admit that there have been and are instances where the strike is used as an easily available instrument for the attainment of ulterior political or economic objectives. Naturally, such cases cannot be dealt with by any of the methods already mentioned. I would go so far as to say that, in such cases, these strikes, sporadic though they may appear to the careless observer, are really parts of an organized and carefully planned campaign for the realization of definite aims. Here individual employers are helpless. for, under these special circumstances, no understanding between capital and labour through the method of discussion and democratic approach is possible or will be permitted by the leaders who are at the back of undesirable

movements of this type. Illiterate labour in India is made the cat's paw of designing men and cannot be saved from their clutches till we have liquidated illiteracy, imparted a minimum amount of education, and made life worth living for labour. Till this is done, labour will continue to be exploited by ambitious men desirous of acquiring political importance and penniless adventurers who would like to make a profession out of labour leadership. But these I would not regard as ultimately so dangerous to the peace and prosperity of India as those others, whose one purpose in life is a fanatical desire to overthrow, at any cost, the present social organization in the hope of building a better one on its foundations.

Communism And The Congress

I think it my duty to clear up here one matter about which I know there is some misunderstanding among our European friends. I have no desire to conceal from any one the fact that I am nationalistic in my outlook with a bias in favour of what has been called the Right Wing of the Congress party. I have heard the Congress, as a whole, criticised more than once as being the happy hunting-ground of communists. But actual facts tell a different story.

It has been authoritatively stated that the communist party in India has no more than a few thousand active members. What these lack in number is made up by their energy and activity. It is held by many that they are insidiously penetrating the Congress organization disguis-

ing their real objective under the cloak of legitimate agitation. That the accredited leaders of the Congress recognized this danger is evident from the following extract from a statement published some time ago by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru.

There are a few, somewhat new to the Congress, who, while apparently agreeing plan differently. They realize that there can be no national and nation-wide movement except through the Congress. All else would be adventurism. They want, therefore, to utilize the Congress and at the same time to break through it in directions which are opposed to Congress policy. The proposed technique is to embed themselves in the Congress and then to undermine its basic creed and method of action. In particular, the continuance of the technique of non-violence is to be combated, not obviously and patently, but insidiously and from within.

This conclusively proves that the Congress has set its face sternly against any encouragement to communism. The reaction of the communists to this attitude of the Congress may be inferred from the programme of work which they outlined in the following terms :

From our past experiences we know that while top leaders of the Congress are suspicious of Socialists and Communists, the rank and file is generally sympathetic. And after a few weeks of struggle it will be the rank and file that shall in many places control the war-councils. If we win their confidence today and start anti-war activities with them, we shall be soon able to more and more influence the movement.

Some European and Indian employers have accused the Leftist Congress group of being communists. It is more than likely that, with millions of members in its ranks, there are communists in the Congress Left who have joined this All-India 'political organisation merely with a view to propagating their political ideas in the most progressive group in the country. It is also equally probable that they hope to convert such large numbers

to their ways of thinking that they will be in a position to capture the Congress organisation in order to use it for their own purposes.

It would not, however, be correct to assume that every section of the Congress Left is infected with communism. Only the other day, four leading Congress Socialists—Masani, Asoke Mehta, Lohia, and Achyut Patwardhan—resigned from the executive of the Socialist party as a protest against the infiltration of communism which, in their opinion, was tending to interfere with the normal and healthy development of the national movement. They stated :

There are many fundamental differences between our principles and approach and those of the communists. Such, for instance, are the attitude towards the Congress ; the adherence to peaceful and legitimate means ; and the attitude towards the Soviet Government.

It therefore follows that, while the Indian National Congress under the leadership of sober-minded, wise men like Mahatma Gandhi, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and others, seeks to utilise all legitimate opportunities for constructive work for our country as a whole, these other men, working underground, are making a definite attempt to utilise our All-India organisation which has built up a reputation for itself by the self-sacrificing devotion of thousands of our countrymen, and countrywomen, to bring about a revolution as a prelude to the acceptance of communistic principles by India.

The only logical way of fighting this menace by the Indian is not to keep away from the Congress, but to strengthen the moderate elements in it ; not to refuse to

admit new members but to see that only true blue Congressmen are admitted. This, I contend, is the motive underlying Mahatma Gandhi's move to purge Congress of members not pledged to "non-violence and truth."

I would also draw my readers' attention to the resolution presented late in 1939, at the All-India Working Committee deploring the abuse of civil liberties as exemplified in speeches and articles printed by certain sections of the press and declaring that the Congress Governments would no longer allow such efforts to encourage violence and hatred to go unpunished. In this connection, the Premier of the United Provinces said that it was the duty of all established Governments, including the Congress Governments, to maintain law and order and that society, life, and property are synonymous with the preservation of civil liberty.

I am referring to this instance merely to prove that the Congress Governments clearly recognised their duty. The Bombay Government had to face opposition both in and outside the Congress ranks on account of the labour legislation it undertook. The Madras Government was quite clear on this matter in its communique dated the 9th August, 1938, in which it referred to the subversive activities of the communist party. I shall quote only two sentences from it :

The Government have in their possession copies of certain pamphlets which are being circulated amongst members of the Communist Party in India. As these show the extravagances to which the Party is committed and the disorders and chaos which the party hopes to introduce into the country, the Government feel it their duty to give publicity to these intentions so that members of the public may be on their guard against becoming

unwittingly involved in a movement the motives of which are wholly opposed to the culture and traditions of India.

If it is said that it is only recently that the Congress has changed its policy, I would refer my readers to a publication of the Communist party which, translated into several vernaculars, was distributed widely in India and specially at the Karachi Congress in 1931. This document mentioned the various aims of the Communist party and made a very vigorous attack on Gandhism and the Indian National Congress maintaining that Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress were formidable impediments in the way of India's attainment of freedom.

If it is argued that only the Right Wing of the Congress is attacked and the Left Wing left untouched because it contains only the subversive elements, I would refer my readers to the section in which the authors discuss the means to be adopted for winning freedom. After pointing out the utter futility of individual acts of terrorism or any ordinary revolutionary armed insurrection, it recommended a general national armed insurrection against Britain and concluded by saying that the most dangerous obstacle to the victory of this revolutionary movement was the Leftist element in the Indian National Congress and very strongly recommended that a ruthless war should be waged against the Left Nationalists.

Another Communist programme for India based on a paper submitted to the Communist International in 1932, was published in 1933, the very first item of which reads as follows: "The liberation of the masses from the influence of the National Congress."

I am thankful to find that there is at least one European industrialist, Mr. H. Horsman (Upper India Chamber of Commerce), who collected some of these facts from sources not ordinary available and who had the fairness to place them before the public in December, 1938.

The Classes And The Masses

Napoleon said that an army marches on its stomach which is true not only of armies but also of the masses. They will follow the leader or the party which promises to fill their stomach and to improve their lot generally. It cannot be said with truth that 100 per cent of the masses understand the programmes of the different political parties. In the language of one of their leaders what they want is

bread, more bread, cheaper bread. Give them a square meal, and they would scorn the pomp of kings.

Today, contentment, peace, and joy have fled from the land. The so-called leaders who are all intellectuals are offering various panaceas. Some are for the old regime, some for Congress and Purna Swaraj, some for Marx and Communism. But whatever political opinion they are preaching, slowly the hitherto inert masses are being inoculated with new aims and aspirations. A general restlessness is observable all over India. They are no longer satisfied with things as they are. By its mass contact movement, the Congress is calling them to join and strengthen its ranks and so far its efforts appear to have been crowned with success. And the reason why it,

more than any other organisation, can claim to embody the national will is that it makes certain demands which concern us as Indians irrespective of the religion we may profess individually and also because the ameliorative programme it is seeking to implement is calculated to benefit all classes of people. The one way to avoid a bloody revolution in India is for employers and capitalists to yield with as much grace as they can to the legitimate demands of the masses and not to fight for retaining all the privileges and advantages they have been enjoying so long.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BIHAR GOVERNMENT AND THE MASSES

The work done for the masses by the Congress Government of Bihar possesses great interest for me perhaps because ever since 1904, I have spent practically every long holiday in one of its districts, the Santhal Parganas, which enjoys a well-deserved reputation for the salubrity of its climate. I have also, from time to time, paid visits to other parts of this province thus gathering first hand knowledge of the various disabilities suffered by the poorer classes inhabiting it. This made me follow carefully the different communiques issued by the Congress Government when it was responsible for the administration of this province and I tried to ascertain for myself the amount and the extent of the benefits resulting from the various measures implemented by it. These are the reasons which make me feel that I have some claim to have my views considered by the public.

Tenancy Reforms

As "Permanent Settlement" is in force in Bihar, all cultivators pay their rent to their landlords who, in their turn, pay it to Government making their profit as middlemen. It is an indisputable fact that, while the rent payable to Government has remained stationary, the middlemen have gradually raised the rent payable by the ryots unjustifiably. This has been a grievance with the tenantry.

In order to redeem the pledges it had given to afford relief to cultivators, the Congress Ministry of Bihar put through legislation the aim of which was to remove this injustice.

As the result of the agrarian laws passed by the Congress Government, the rent was reduced. It has been estimated that the reduction in cash rent is about 25 per cent, while the reduction in commuted rent is about six annas in the rupee. Provision was also made for the entire or partial remission of rent if the soil of a holding had deteriorated by deposit of sand, submersion under water, or any other specific cause, or if the landlord had failed to maintain such facilities for irrigation as he is bound under law to maintain. Provision for relief was also made where land had been lost through flood or inundation.

So far as occupancy and transfer rights are concerned, under the new laws, any tenant who has cultivated land in a village for twelve years, automatically becomes a "settled ryot" of the village. Every settled ryot acquires a right of occupancy not only in respect of all the land he has cultivated for twelve years, but also in respect of all other land which may have come into his possession as a tenant. An occupancy holding is heritable and the heir of a deceased tenant gets the right without having to pay any premium to the landlord. The occupancy tenant cannot be ejected from his holding for non-payment of rent or for any other reason except for rendering the land unfit for cultivation. He is entitled to manufacture bricks and tiles for domestic and agricultural purposes, to excavate tanks, or to dig wells for supply of water and to erect dwelling houses for his own use. Then again, the right of transfer of an

occupancy holding in whole or in part is given to a tenant without the need of payment of any premium to the landlord.

These are some of the new rights conferred on tenants under the legislation enacted by the Congress Government of Bihar and they undoubtedly prove that the Congress party is desirous of benefiting the masses of India who are mainly agriculturists, by affording them all reasonable protection in the enjoyment of the land they cultivate and on the produce of which they depend for their subsistence.

Every inhabitant of Bihar must be aware that, under the new Tenancy Amendment Acts, occupancy ryots have the right, under certain specified circumstances, to claim reduction in rent. Government which is the landlord, so far as Khas Mahal villages are concerned, passed orders that *the officers concerned should take immediate steps to grant remission of rent to the tenants.*

Then again, as large tracts of arable land were found lying unoccupied in certain parts of the province, the local officers were instructed to settle these with the landless, the Depressed classes, aboriginals, or Muslims living close to these areas and, if such tenants were not forthcoming, with educated youngmen of the province.

In order to benefit people living in the rural areas, the Bihar Government made an attempt to utilise the forests in the province as a national asset. The fees which have to be paid for buying forest products were reduced, while some of the people were altogether exempted from any kind of royalty so that the poor people can now utilise them for their benefit.

Development Of Sugar Industry

One of the results of protection was a great increase in the number of sugar mills in many parts of India including Bihar and the United Provinces. The cultivation of sugarcane as a money crop also increased very rapidly till a time came when, taking advantage of the poverty of the growers and their lack of holding capacity, the sugar mills began to purchase the cane at prices much below the actual cost of production. The same difficulty had to be faced in the U. P. The two Congress Governments put their heads together, held joint conferences and, at last, passed laws which enabled both growers and manufacturers to secure a reasonable profit. I shall not enter into details but the result has been that, in Bihar, the minimum price of sugarcane has been maintained throughout the season at annas five a maund for supply of sugarcane at railway stations and five and a quarter annas per maund for supply at the factory gate. This has resulted in additions to the slender income of the cultivators who were formerly compelled to sell their sugarcane at three and a half annas per maund, or even less. The manufacturers too, it seems, were able to secure better prices for their sugar. This Act has, on the whole, benefited both the cultivators and the manufacturers.

In this connection, it should be noted that the Congress Governments of Bihar and U.P., were the first to take their courage in their hands and to fix the minimum price of an agricultural product grown in millions of acres. There were many Cassandras who predicted that the attempt would

end in a dismal failure. But these Congressmen refused to listen to them and persisted in the work they had undertaken with the result that the poor agriculturists at last got a fair price for their cane.

Promotion Of Agricultural Prosperity

In order to encourage improvement in agriculture, the Bihar Government set apart ten scholarships of the value of Rs. 40 each per month to enable suitable youngmen to obtain higher agricultural training at the Cawnpore Agriculture College. In addition, this Government granted ten scholarships of Rs. 10 each per month to the sons of actual cultivators for training them in practical agriculture. Some agricultural overseers in Government employment who had been deputed to be trained in bee-keeping, after their return, assisted with advice those who had adopted bee-keeping as a subsidiary occupation.

In order that the actual cultivators might benefit from the research work of the Agriculture Department, its propaganda staff concentrated their efforts in selected thanas of each district and, for this work, the Bihar Government sanctioned extra funds at the rate of Rs. 300/- per thana.

To help the cultivators by offering facilities for improving their stock, the Bihar Government supplied pedigree bulls in many areas, increased the veterinary staff and added about 40 new veterinary hospitals, all located in comparatively inaccessible parts of the province. After coming into power, the Bihar Congress Government adopted

a forward policy in the direction of flood prevention, irrigation, and the drainage of water-logged areas. Progress was made in all these three directions and when the operations initiated by them are finished, there is little doubt that not only would the productivity of the soil now under cultivation be increased, but also that land, now unfit for cultivation, would be brought under the plough.

The Bihar Government adopted a scheme of rural development costing about one lakh per annum in the first year. More than 200 stipendiaries were trained and deputed to selected areas to carry on rural development work and to teach the villagers to live better, happier, and more decent lives. For this, a special supervising staff was appointed the duty of which was to inspect their work and to offer suitable advice for improving it.

As Congressmen and followers of Mahatma Gandhi, the members of the Bihar Government were aware of the importance of Cottage industries for the agriculturist. As soon as they came into office, they spent Rs. 30,000 to organise the production of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth on a large scale and to extend the work to new areas. To encourage the use of locally made silk yarn, Government also spent Rs. 15,000/- for a suitable plant and made an annual grant of about Rs. 4,000/- for teaching the art of silk-weaving.

Paper-making classes were started as also classes for teaching hand-weaving and basket-making for the women thrown out of employment in the Jheria coal-fields. Further, two demonstration parties were employed to go about from village to village teaching *mochis* and *chamars*

improved methods of flaying, tanning, and leather working. My information is that this cost approximately Rs. 20,000/-

In order that there might be a ready market for the products of Cottage industries, the Bihar Government passed orders that the uniforms of peons and orderlies should always be of *Khaddar* and that, in purchasing stores, preference should always be given to articles manufactured in Bihar and, in the matter of medical stores, to articles of Indian manufacture.

Co-operation in Bihar

I followed with great interest the account of the experiment the Bihar Cabinet made by giving theoretical and practical training to future officers of its Co-operative Department from which I learnt that a fairly large number of students, to whom small stipends were given, were trained at the Co-operative Training Institute at Pusa. My attention was drawn to the words of the then Bihar Premier, Mr. Srikrishna Sinha, who was reported to have said that his Government was

determined to revive the co-operative movement not only to keep it alive but also to make it beautiful, so that the life of the villager may be fuller and richer in every way.

In pursuance of this scheme, the Bihar Government planned to develop Co-operative activities in all aspects. This included putting the central banks on a sound basis and developing and improving the village societies by weeding out undesirable elements from them. It was intended that the villagers should be trained to form non-credit societies

such as rural welfare, consumers', weavers' and cane-growers' societies, etc. As the work of the officers had to be largely done in rural areas, the principal emphasis was, naturally enough, laid on agriculture. In addition to the imparting of theoretical instruction by the officers of the Agriculture Department, the stipendiaries were trained on the practical side of agriculture. Demonstration parties of students visited rural areas where the preparation and use of different kinds of manure were taught to them and, through them, to the villagers. Qualified teachers also delivered lectures on personal hygiene and village sanitation. They were taught how to ensure the safety of drinking water, what steps to take during epidemics, how to dispose of village refuse, what food to eat, and how to balance the diet so as to avoid deficiency diseases. Theoretical and practical instruction was also given in first aid. Other series of lectures dealt with Cottage industries, irrigation, weaving, dyeing, and printing cotton stuff.

I am indebted for all this information to an old pupil of mine now permanently settled in Bihar who wrote to me in glowing terms not only of the excellent arrangements made for training future workers but also of the way in which they utilised their knowledge for the benefit of the masses.

Uplift Of Harijans and Backward Classes

From the Census Report for 1931, it appears that, out of a total population of about 2 crores 59 lakhs in Bihar, about 65 lakhs are aborigines and members of the Depressed and Backward classes. As the result of the movement for

their uplift initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress Ministry of Bihar took steps to encourage their progress in various directions.

It spent about Rs. 19,000 for special scholarships for the "General" education of children coming from these castes. Special stipends of the total value of about Rs. 14,000 were also provided for their technical and industrial training. In order to extend the existing facilities for their education, the Bihar Government opened about 350 new Primary schools at a cost of Rs. 20,000 for aboriginal boys in those districts where there is an aboriginal population. Stipends were provided and seats reserved in medical schools for boys coming from the Harijan, the aboriginal, and other backward classes.

A sum of half a lakh was spent for providing safe drinking water for Harijans and aboriginals in rural areas. Government spent Rs. 6,000 for the prevention of malaria among the aboriginals in those districts where they form the bulk of the population. It made a special grant of Rs. 10,000 for developing Cottage industries among them. To improve communications in these areas, the Bihar Government made a capital grant of about Rs. 40,000 and an annual recurring grant of Rs. 15,000.

In addition to the above grants for various ameliorative purposes, the Bihar Government spent in 1938-1939, one lakh for irrigation projects in Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas so as to help the agriculturists of these areas. Further, grain *golas* were started in the former so that the cultivators might not be compelled to borrow money at ruinous rates of interest from village money-lenders.

The Bihar Government issued orders that special consideration should be shown to these people, in making nominations to local bodies so that they might be trained in taking their legitimate share in public life. Lastly, in making appointments to ministerial and non-Gazetted posts, the Bihar Government ordered that special consideration should be given to the claims of candidates belonging to these groups. In these ways, all possible facilities were placed at their disposal so that they might gradually come to occupy their rightful position in every sphere of life.

Jail Reform

Recognising that jails should be utilised not so much for punishing criminals as for reforming their character so that, after their release, they might have a chance of rehabilitating themselves, the Government of Bihar abolished degrading forms of punishment and of physical labour in jails. The diet was improved and a campaign of literacy started among prisoners with phenomenal success. The well-behaved among them were released before their term of imprisonment was over.

In order that prisoners might learn some useful ways of earning their bread after serving their term and not be compelled to go back to crime to support themselves, the Bihar Government made arrangements for teaching various Cottage industries in prisons. Among other things, these included hand-spinning of cotton, tussore, and wool on the *charka*, weaving of cotton and silk fabrics and of blankets on hand-looms, *eri* rearing and spinning,

cane work, basket-making and carpentry. For all this, the Bihar Government made a grant of over half a lakh and also opened a showroom for the sale of jail-made articles.

This attempt to convert jails from places of punishment into reformatories shows the possession of that truly humane and charitable spirit which one has come to associate with Mahatma Gandhi and his faithful admirers and followers such as the members of the defunct Bihar Cabinet.

Medical Relief and Public Health

The Bihar Government made a beginning in the work of providing medical aid for the rural population by appointing four medical men for each district. Each such officer in addition to drawing a salary varying from Rs 40 to 80 per month, was allowed an annual subsidy for medicines to be distributed free to the poor people. Additional Public Health Officers were also appointed for giving help to those poor districts which are unable to provide such officers out of their own funds. Arrangements were made for the training of larger numbers of Indian nurses in the Patna Medical College Hospital. About ten scholarships of the value of Rs. 30 each per month were established for lady students of medicine.

In order to combat malaria, the Bihar Government provided funds for various schemes at an approximate cost of nearly 1 lakh 10 thousand. In addition, starting from 1937-38, Government paid every year Rs. 10,000 for tuberculosis clinics in each district. A travelling dispensary

and a temporary plague hospital were also financed for operating in Bettiah where this disease had been causing heavy loss of life.

All these, and similar other measures which I have refrained from mentioning mainly on account of want of space, show how alive the Congress Government of Bihar was to the necessity of providing medical relief and public health facilities for the poor people in both rural and urban areas.

Prohibition

Prohibition was inaugurated in District Saran on the 1st April, 1938. In pre-Prohibition days, there were 1,955 shops for toddy, 95 shops for Country spirit and 74 shops for Ganja and Bhang. Licenses for none of these shops were renewed on the introduction of Prohibition. In addition, the licenses of over 450 liquor shops situated in objectionable sites in other parts of the province were not renewed. Prohibition was also introduced in the districts of Ranchi and Hazaribagh. It was understood that the Bihar Government had, under contemplation, the extension of Prohibition to other parts of the province. This was stopped when it ceased functioning. It has been estimated that the introduction of this ameliorative measure entailed a loss of revenue amounting to between 18 and 20 lakhs. It goes without saying that the introduction of this measure in these three districts indicated the desire of the Congress Government of Bihar to save the masses from the evil

effects of indulgence in alcoholic stimulants and narcotic drugs.

Adult Education

From the time that the Congress party came into power in Bihar, it consistently followed a policy aimed at the abolition of illiteracy among adults, the extension of literacy among women, the encouragement of Muslim education, and the spread of literacy among aborigines, the members of the hill tribes, and the Harijans.

As the result of the first mass campaign for the banishment of illiteracy conducted in the short period of less than six months, about 3 lakhs of adults learnt to read and write. In one of the last communiques on adult education issued by the Bihar Government, it was stated that there were about 11,000 night schools in which nearly 3 lakhs of adults were under instruction. Literacy centres were also started in industrial areas like Jamshedpur and the larger sugar mills as also in jails, with phenomenal success. More than 50 per cent of the *chaukidars* became literate while every one of the police constables was taught to read and write.

The most wonderful thing in this movement was that most of the teachers worked on an honorary basis. In 1939, the Bihar Government set apart 2 lakhs for the purpose of financing adult education. It is probable that, if the Bihar Government had not withdrawn itself from the work of administration, the percentage of literacy which is practically the lowest is British India,

would have been the highest provided there had been no abatement in the intensity of the campaign.

Education Of Females

According to the Census of 1931, the percentage of literacy among females in Bihar was about 2·5 only. The Bihar Government realised that it was not at all likely that the campaign of mass literacy would be availed of very widely by adult females in the rural areas. They also understood that if they desired to raise the percentage of literacy among females, they must begin at the other end, that is, try to popularise reading and writing among the girls.

With this end in view, they adopted a scheme for starting at least one primary school for girls in the headquarters of every thana, a middle school for girls in every sub-divisional headquarters, and a high school for girls in every district headquarters. Funds were provided for all these educational institutions. Women students could, under certain circumstances, study without having to pay tuition fees in Government colleges. Scholarships were also given liberally to those deserving and meritorious girls who desired to pursue higher education.

A larger number of women teachers of primary schools than in the past, were admitted into the training centres at Gaya and Muzzaffarpore and there was some talk of opening other special training schools for women teachers. So far as women matriculates and graduates

who desired to embrace teaching as their profession were concerned, the Bihar Government provided special stipends tenable at the Training College and the Training School at Patna.

These are only some of the steps taken by the Congress Government of Bihar to encourage female education from the primary right up to the highest university stage. Scholarships and stipends were allotted by it in so many directions and in so many different ways, that it became easy for any poor and meritorious girl to educate herself up to the graduate stage without being compelled to spend much money out of her own pocket.

Muslim Education

It is a matter of regret that some of our Mussalman brethren are always accusing the different Congress Ministers of neglecting the interests of their community. As I am dealing with the work of the Congress Government of Bihar, I feel that this is not the place where it is at all necessary to mention what was done by the Congress in other parts of India for the benefit of this community. I shall content myself with merely mentioning that, in all the measures taken by the Bihar Government for improving the lot of the people of this province, the Muslims were, generally speaking, benefited to the same extent as the non-Muslims and further, that no distinction was, so far as I am aware, ever made between Muslims and non-Muslims in the enjoyment of the benefits which accrued from these ameliorative steps.

So far as the important item of *Muslim* education is concerned, we have to remember that, according to official records, this community forms 12·79 per cent of the total population. It can therefore rightfully claim that, at least, 12·79 per cent of the amount spent on education should be spent for its benefit. The total amount spent on education in this province in 1937-38, was Rs. 75,84,000 approximately. Therefore the amount which, under this calculation, ought to be spent on the education of Muslims, ought not to be less than Rs. 9,86,000. Actually, the Bihar Government spent approximately Rs. 11,04,000 for the education of Muslims. This exceeds what may be called the Muslim dues by nearly Rs. 1,18,000

To this should be added the fact that in 1937-38, the Bihar Government spent for Muslim education exclusively the enormous sum of nearly 5,90,000. I feel great regret that want of space does not permit me to give a detailed account of the various grants to Government and aided institutions for Muslim stipends and scholarships, the grants to Persian and Urdu libraries which together go to make up this large amount. This conclusively proves that the Congress Government of Bihar was not only fair but, more than that, it was actually generous to Muslim claims.

Three Outstanding Accomplishments

My long, but I hope not utterly tiresome, account of the beneficent activities of the Bihar Government which, let me assure my readers, makes no pretension to be an exhaustive one, has come to its end. It had

perforce to be inadequate for any description which would cover the whole field would have required more space than I can command here. But I would ask every one to remember that the inadequacy of my account is no proof of the inadequacy of the work done. After this, no reasonable man can deny that the Bihar Government and, along with it, all Congress Governments which worked according to one plan, were really interested in the welfare of the masses and, with the slender financial resources at their command, tried to do everything which lay in their power to introduce all-round improvements in their condition.

So far as Bihar is concerned, it will be remembered hereafter for at least three things. The first of these consists in the measures it initiated to improve the condition of the ryots. The second was the campaign it launched against illiteracy and the success which crowned its efforts. The third was its legislation aimed at fixing the minimum price of sugarcane, an agricultural product grown over millions of acres, and the ability the Bihar Government displayed in framing it in such a way that it benefited both the grower and the manufacturer.

CHAPTER IX

SOME ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE BIHAR CONGRESS GOVERNMENT

Our great National All-India organisation has, all along, been subject to various kinds of criticism. One of these, to which no satisfactory reply could be given in the past, was that the Congress was, more or less, an organisation of the intelligent, educated middle class, that it had little, if any, concern with the masses who did not join it as they never cared for politics. In 1937, the Congress members, according to its officials, were more than 45 lakhs in number. Such figures are, however, in a sense misleading for they give us only the number of those who paid their subscriptions and joined the organisation formally, I am quite certain that those who sympathise with Congress ideals and wholeheartedly co-operate with the Congress in implementing its economic and social programme, are many times this number. Where is the man unreasonable enough to say to-day that the Congress is an organisation of the middle class or of the rich ? Is there any one in India foolish enough to suggest that all, or nearly all, these 45 lakhs belonged to the middle class ?

No political organisation can claim to be truly representative unless it contains within it members drawn from every social, economic, and religious group. This proud distinction justly belongs to the Congress. If we have

kisans and mazdoors, clerks and teachers, lawyers and politicians, we have also bankers, industrialists, and businessmen worth crores of rupees. Similarly, we have also representatives of every religious faith professed in India, Hindu and Muslim, Christian and Sikh, Zoroastrian and Buddhist. The one thing common to all Congressmen is the genuine desire to benefit and serve the masses. This utter negation of self, this ardent desire to serve the brother Indian, is so great that the cost involved is never taken into account.

Commencing from our great leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who cheerfully gave up a most lucrative practice in South Africa, we find Pundit Motilal Nehru's son our beloved Jawaharlal and his whole family sacrificing immense wealth on behalf of the national cause. Other instances in point are Shankerlal Banker, Jarnalal Bajaj, our Chitta Ranjan Das, the young Muslim Umar Sobhani, one of the richest men in Bombay, the celebrated Dr. Ansari, the famous Hakim Ajmal Khan. Who does not know the immense sacrifices of Rajendra Prasad, of Rajagopalacharia, of Pant, of Kher, and of Sinha the ex-Premiers of the different Congress provinces? The list could be added to almost indefinitely. These men have given up their all and have gladly exchanged comfort, or rather luxury, for coarse *Khaddar* and a life spent in incessant labour and continuous sacrifice for our country's masses. Mahatma Gandhi, our All-India national leader, has fixed his home in a village near Wardha and I feel that he has done so because he is desirous of daily experiencing himself those difficulties which are being undergone by our rural brethren. I would

not be surprised if, at long last, it is found that his enthusiasm for rural work finds its best inspiration in the disadvantages from which he suffers in his village home.

It is true enough that some among these who, sometime ago, were guiding the destinies of India do not themselves come from the masses. All of them are educated and some wealthy. But the question which concerns us is whether they identified themselves fully with the masses and also whether they did everything which lay in their power to benefit them.

In this chapter, it is my intention to place before my readers my ideas of what the Congress Cabinet did for Bihar. It would not be true to say that I have personal knowledge of every one of the ameliorative measures referred to below. But I have a home of my own in Bihar, have visited most parts of the province and seen many of the things referred to with my own eyes. I am aware that I have missed many important things and that what I shall put before my readers cannot but be an incomplete inventory of all the good work done by the Congress Ministry.

My contention is that the work of the Bihar Cabinet is merely a sample of what had been attempted by the Congress Ministries in all parts of India, for all these Governments were seeking to put through, of course with modifications demanded by local conditions, one uniform plan aimed at benefiting our masses. If I succeed in convincing my readers that the Bihar Government did everything which lay in its power to help our poor and ignorant brethren, I have proved, though indirectly, that

the other Congress Governments were doing practically the same thing.

Agrarian Legislation

Among other things, the Act passed by the Bihar Congress Government provides for (i) the cancellation of all enhancements between January, 1911, and December, 1936 ; (ii) total or partial remission of rent in cases where the soil has deteriorated by deposit of sand or submersion under water or where the landlord had neglected the irrigation arrangements which he is bound to maintain ; (iii) reduction of rent where there has been a fall in the average local prices of staple food crops (not due to a temporary cause) during the currency of the present rent ; and (iv) settlement of fair rent in other suitable cases.

Formerly, a ryot's entire holding was sold, in most cases, for nominal prices. Now only that part of the holding can be sold which is, in the opinion of the court, sufficient to satisfy the decree. The ryot has been given complete immunity against arrest and detention in civil prison in execution of a decree for rent. Even his house and movables cannot be attached and sold in execution of such decrees ; illegal exactions by landlords or their agents have been made a penal offence punishable with imprisonment which may extend to six months or with fine which may extend to Rs. 500 or with both.

On account of the economic depression which began in 1929, many ryots were unable to pay the rents of their holdings with the result that many holdings were sold for

arrears of rent and purchased by the landlords, in most cases, for nominal prices. To remedy this, the Bihar Restoration of Bakasht Lands and Reduction of Arrears of Rent was enacted. This Act deals with two matters, namely. (i) restoration of lands which had been sold in execution of decrees for arrears of rent during the depression and (ii) reduction of arrears which had accumulated during the said period.

Organisation Of Sugar Industry

The sugar industry has developed very rapidly in recent years and large numbers of sugar factories have sprung up in Bihar. The cultivation of sugarcane has also increased by leaps and bounds. As the result of this, the factories commenced to take undue advantage of the extensive cultivation of cane and the helplessness of the cane-growers. The Bihar Sugar Factories Control Act, 1937, was passed with a view to ensuring the progress of the industry on sound lines in the interests of both the grower and of the industry as a whole. The new Act provides for the licensing of sugar factories, regulation of the supply of cane, and development of cane cultivation in factory "zones," the encouragement of cane-growers, the organisation of co-operative societies, and the elimination of cut-throat competition between factories, besides fixation of minimum price for sugarcane and the establishment of a Sugar Control Board and Advisory Committees. As the result of this piece of legislation, a fair price is ensured both to growers and manufacturers. It has to

be stated in this connection that the attempt to fix the minimum price of sugarcane cultivated over very large areas was undertaken by the Bihar and U. P. Congress Governments jointly and also that it met with unprecedented success.

Relief To Debtors

It was pointed out by the Provincial Banking Committees of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa when the last two provinces were under one Government, that about the year 1929, when these enquiries were held, the population of Bengal was 50 per cent. more than the population of Bihar and Orissa but that the burden of debt of Bihar and Orissa was 50 per cent. more than that of Bengal. It is true that, after the inauguration of provincial autonomy, Orissa was separated from Bihar but this has made no difference so far as the burden of debt is concerned. It has been stated authoritatively that 90 per cent. of the population of Bihar are deeply in debt and that, for all practical purposes, they are living in a perpetual state of bankruptcy.

The Bihar Money-Lenders' Act was designed to give relief to debtors by regulating money-lending within the province. Provision has been made for the registration of money-lenders who are bound to maintain proper accounts and to give receipt to their debtors for all payments made. No one who is not a registered money-lender can institute any suit for the recovery of his dues from the debtor. The rates of interest have been fixed

at not more than 9 per cent. per annum in the case of secured and 12 per cent. per annum in the case of unsecured loans. But in no case can a decree on account of interest be passed for an amount which exceeds the principal advanced.

Prohibition

Like all Congress Governments, the Bihar Government was committed to the policy of prohibition of alcoholic beverages and narcotics. Prohibition was introduced in the district of Saran with effect from the 1st April, 1938. This has an area of nearly 2,700 square miles and a population of nearly 25 lakhs. In pursuance of its policy, the Bihar Government did not renew the licenses of shops in this district. In other words, about 2150 licenses were cancelled which caused a loss in the revenue amounting to about Rs. 10 lakhs. Government had also to think about the 5,000 odd people who were engaged in the business of supplying these articles. Many of them were given land in Khas Mahal areas which they took to cultivating thus leading better lives than in the past. After April, 1939, the Bihar Government extended Prohibition to two other districts in the province, viz., Ranchi and Hazaribagh. Between them, the total area of these two districts is 14,123 square miles and the population is approximately 31 lakhs. It is understood that with Prohibition in three districts, the loss of revenue would be between 18 and 20 lakhs every year.

From the reports received from the officers in charge

of these districts, it appears that Prohibition was welcomed by all classes of people. Even the addicts expressed satisfaction that abstinence from drink had been made compulsory for, according to many of them, without it, they would never have found it possible to give up their evil habits. The women and children hailed this move on the part of the Bihar Government with delight for the earnings were not wasted and therefore more money was available for food, clothing, and the other necessities of life.

It is to be noted that, in all these areas, the people benefited were almost universally the poorer people specially of the cultivator class. No one can deny that by the sacrifice of such a large amount of revenue, the Bihar Government undoubtedly proved its love for the masses.

Imposition Of New Taxes

In order to find more money for nation-building activities and for improving the condition of the rural masses, Government imposed some new taxes. Of these fiscal measures, the most important was the Bihar Agricultural Income-tax Act. Next in importance were the Bihar Stamp (Amendment) Act and the Bihar Entertainments Duty Act. The taxes imposed through these measures affected only the well-off and did not touch the poorer classes. Under the Agricultural Income-tax Act, petty landlords and the smaller cultivators are left untouched, incomes below rupees five thousand having been exempted from the tax. The Bihar Stamp (Amendment) Act enhances the rate of

stamp duty on certain instruments, etc., so as to bring in an increased annual revenue. The Bihar Entertainments Duty Act empowers the levy of a tax on all payments received for admission to places of public entertainment. Government saw no reason why those who derive large, or relatively large, incomes from agriculture should not pay taxes on those incomes or why those who spend money on entertainments should not contribute something towards the revenues of the State.

The Anti-Illiteracy Campaign In Bihar

According to the Census of 1931, the province of Bihar, so far as literacy is concerned, stands lowest. The percentages of literacy for the different provinces are as follows :—Bengal—11 ; Madras—11·8 ; Bombay—10·2 ; Assam—9·1 ; C. P.—6 ; Punjab—5·9 ; Bihar—5·2. Recognising the seriousness of this menace, Dr. Syed Mahmud, Minister of Education, started the Mass Literacy movement towards the end of April, 1938. It is noteworthy that the Minister of Education succeeded in infecting thousands of our countrymen with the passion of doing this great nation-building work without which the phenomenal success referred to below could not have been achieved.

The Mass Literacy Committee recruited and trained thousands of honorary workers, printed special charts and primers for illiterate adults, and organised literacy centres in every part of the province. Professors and teachers arranged lantern lectures on useful and interesting subjects to supplement the ordinary instruction imparted at these

centres. Funds for contingent expenditure were collected by local subscriptions and, in some cases, grants were made by local bodies. The text of the primers and charts which are in Hindusthani were printed in Nagri and Urdu scripts the result being that, in a large number of literacy centres, many Hindus and Moslems learnt both these scripts.

Literacy work was organised in jails. Arrangements were made to make all police and *chaukidars* literate within six months or so. Industrial concerns were also persuaded to join the movement. While the main agency for instruction consisted in the honorary labour of teachers, students, unemployed youngmen, and social workers, provision was made for the payment of a small honorarium of five annas per each adult male literate. Small grants-in-aid were also made to meet the cost of contingent expenditure. To ensure lasting literacy, a carefully graduated series of readers was prepared and provision made for the publication of a fortnightly in Hindusthani printed in Nagri and Urdu scripts. It was held that, if the intensity of the movement could be maintained, it would be possible to banish illiteracy from Bihar in about 10 years. It has been stated that, within four months of starting the campaign, over 3 lakhs of adults were made literate.

There were four types of schools for adults :—(1) Organisations which did not seek grants from Government. These included the Tata Company, sugar mills, collieries, and other industrial concerns. (2) Private organisations such as churches, clubs of women, and other public associations. (3) Colleges and High schools which offered facilities to

their students to take part in this campaign in the evenings, on Saturdays, and during vacations. (4) Permanent centres where teachers, in addition to their work during the day, engaged in teaching at night. It was estimated in May, 1939, that there were more than eleven thousand night schools for adults with an enrolment of nearly three lakhs. This was in addition to an equal number previously made literate. According to a communique, all the police constables in Bihar were made literate while out of 48,000 *chaukidars*, 22,000 had learnt to read and write.

Probably the most interesting feature of the movement was that it also spread in the jails. A literacy campaign was started in the Gaya Jail in July, 1938, with the result that practically every illiterate prisoner became literate while many of them went up to the fifth standard in one year. At the Bhagalpur Central Jail, about 6,200 male and female prisoners learnt to read and write in the course of a single year. The expansion of literacy among women progressed steadily. The Bihar Council of Women gave a great impetus to the movement and appealed to other women's organisations for help and co-operation.

The literacy campaign at Jamshedpur was begun by the Tata Iron and Steel Company in July 19, 1938. There were about seventy centres here with an enrolment of nearly 3,600 adults of whom about 20 per cent. are women. According to the statement of the General Manager of this company, it was probable that Jamshedpur would be literate in about five years.

The anti-illiteracy campaign which was originally started on a purely voluntary basis, was, later on, placed

on a permanent footing. In 1939, the Bihar Government gave a grant of Rs. 80,000 but next year it was increased to 2 lakhs and then it went out of power.

Great credit is due to the Bihar Government for the ability with which the ministers organised this campaign, the ease with which they secured the loyal co-operation of the volunteer workers, the thoroughness with which they did the work, and the success which crowned their efforts. Bihar, the most backward of provinces in India so far as literacy is concerned, became the acknowledged leader in this work in India in just the same way as Madras, notorious for its drunkenness, became the leader in the Prohibition movement. All honour to those of our leaders who, undeterred by the serious difficulties which stood in their way, boldly faced and successfully solved these two great problems.

Even non-Indians who watched the mass literacy campaign at close quarters were filled with admiration and realised its importance. This is evident from what Dr. Laubach, that world-famous specialist on adult education, said on this matter. He observed,

The significance of the Bihar campaign is hardly to be exaggerated. If it turns out to be a signal success as it promises to do, all India will be encouraged. If it should fail, all similar campaigns now afoot would be affected and perhaps killed. Since India has one-third of all the illiterates in the world, the success of Bihar would probably mean the start of the most titanic educational movement of all times. More than one-half of the human race are still illiterate. India is now awake and full of faith that the task can be accomplished.

After all this, dare even the worst enemy of the Indian National Congress suggest that it does not take any genuine interest in the welfare of the masses? Surely, they must

admit that this is the last charge that can justly be brought against the Congress Ministers.

Ministers' Salaries

Of the acts falling under this group, those worth mentioning are the acts fixing the salaries of ministers, the officers and members of the legislatures. The salary which the ministers, under the old constitution, used to draw was Rs. 48,000 each per annum. Even under the new constitution of 1935, before the advent of the Congress Government, the salary which the interim Premier used to draw was Rs. 24,000 per year and the salary of each of the other interim ministers was Rs. 18,000 per annum. Following their ideal of economy and national service, the Congress Cabinet, voluntarily fixed for themselves a salary of only Rs. 6,000 each per year. In this respect no distinction was made between the Prime Minister and the other ministers.

This compares very favourably with what we find in the two non-Congress provinces of Bengal and the Punjab. According to the monthly published by the U. P. Government and known as *Public Information*, the amount spent out of the taxes for each minister of Bengal was Rs. 37,508 per year, while the amount spent every year for each minister of the Punjab was Rs. 45,755

Similarly, the salaries of the Speaker of the Bihar Assembly and of the President of the Bihar Council were also fixed at Rs. 6,000 per year. In this connection, we have to remember that the President of the old Legislative Council used to draw a salary of Rs. 24,000 a year. In

so far as the daily and travelling allowances of members of the legislatures are concerned, each of them used formerly to draw a daily allowance of Rs. 10 and first-class travelling. By the "Members' Salaries and Allowances Act, 1938," each of the members of the legislatures was given a salary of Rs. 900 per year, only second-class travelling allowance, and a daily allowance of Rs. 3 during the session of the legislatures. These measures alone were expected to effect a saving of thousands of rupees annually. It seems to me that this one fact alone is sufficient to prove the great concern felt for the masses by the Congress leaders who were willing to work on a basis of sacrifice in order to effect economies so that more money might be available for helping the poor people.

The Rational Outlook

A question which presents itself to almost every thinking man is what exactly is the nature and the amount of the beneficent work accomplished or proposed to have been accomplished by the different Provincial Governments which came into power after the introduction of provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935. Just as there are nationalists in every part of India, so also there are various parties and groups which either openly proclaim or indirectly suggest that though large promises were made by politicians or by political parties, they have not been fulfilled. This type of criticism was levelled specially against the different Congress Governments.

It is known to every one that, till the other day, the Congress was in charge of the work of administration in

seven provinces, that it formed a Congress-Coalition Government in another province and that in only three out of the eleven provinces of British India did we have non-Congress Governments. What, one may well ask, is the reason why the Congress which, only the other day, was a proscribed organisation, achieved such wonderful success at the polls ? The answer to this lies in the fact that though, in the past, the Indian National Congress was composed of the educated middle class and of some of the more well-to-do Indian businessmen, mill-owners, bankers, etc., it is no longer the exclusive body it was at one time. Under the influence and guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, it has succeeded in drawing within its ranks, agricultural and industrial labour as well as members of the lower middle class. Nowhere is this seen on a larger scale than in the province of Bihar where Kishan organisations played so important a part in shaping the policy of public administration.

It is quite true that, before the Congress came into power, many of our poorer and less educated brethren imagined that they would have a new heaven and a new earth as soon as the work of administration was taken up by our national organisation. They quite naturally felt disappointed because the high hopes they had entertained were not fulfilled. I would ask all to consider the amount of progress achieved in India during the time that the administration of our motherland was in the hands of the British Government and then to pass their judgment on the work done by different Congress Ministries. No fair-minded man will deny that the British Government has

done much for us but, at the same time, we should not forget that the progress we see to-day was achieved during a period extending to nearly two centuries.

The Congress Governments, on the other hand, were in power for a little over two years. All along, they had been in the opposition and their only work had consisted in criticising the doings, good, bad and indifferent, of our rulers. I question whether a single man among the present leaders had any experience of the work of administration. On coming into power they had, first of all, to familiarise themselves with the routine work of daily administration and to study each problem, many of them unfamiliar, in all its bearings. It is true that they had been receiving the willing and loyal co-operation of the permanent staff—probably the best possible proof of that sense of discipline which lies at the root of the success of the British as administrators in every sphere of life.

It was only after mastering all these details that the ministers in the different Congress provinces were able to initiate new legislation and to adopt new policies. It should be noted that a majority of these measures aimed at the benefit of the masses for, under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, all genuine Congressmen have realised that the improvement and prosperity of India ultimately depend on the educational, social, and economic uplift of all her children and not on the well-being of only the rich and the educated among them. I admit that much remains to be done in this direction but, at the same time, I am constrained to point out that much was done within the two years or so that the Congress was in power. We

should all remember that the members of the different Congress cabinets are human beings with limited powers and not magicians who can do in the twinkling of an eye what an ordinary man takes months and years to accomplish. I contend that, taking into account the difficulties which had to be overcome, the progress achieved within the short period when they were in office is quite satisfactory and I would request every genuine lover of India and of the cause of nationalism to trust and to give them time in which to carry to a successful issue the task they have set themselves. As it is, they have a sufficiently heavy burden to carry. It is not wise to add to their difficulties by ungracious and very often unjust and bitter criticism the only effect of which is to embarrass them and to curtail their usefulness as willing, cheerful, and unselfish servants of our motherland and her children.

CHAPTER X

PROHIBITION IN INDIA

India is a land of total abstainers. Up to the present, the habit of drinking is confined to comparatively small numbers. Among the poorer classes, it leads to excessive poverty. Unlike Western countries, conditions in India are favourable to Prohibition. Tradition, religion, and social sentiment favour total abstinence but Government in the past was not sympathetic because narcotics and especially, alcohol, had proved to be an ever-increasing source of indirect taxation and helpful to revenue. Thus, in 1920, the revenue from drink and drugs for the whole of India was 60 million rupees. Eight years later, in 1928, it had risen to 235 million rupees and in 1934, to 1,000 million rupees.

Government Monopoly And Its Implications

From Muslim days, the excise policy adopted had been the control, rather than, the prohibition of the manufacture and sale of drink and drugs. The British who inherited this system, tightened the control and gradually secured larger and larger revenues from this source. It did not take long for them to realise that taxation of the drink and drug habits was the very best method of obtaining from the poorest of the poor, part of the cost of administration, a method at once simple, cheap as regards the

staff necessary to exercise an effective check on illicit manufacture and sale, and extensively applicable. Theoretically, legislation bearing on excise was meant to check the evils of excess but, actually, the intention was the collection of revenue, which has always been the first and the chief consideration.

The difficulties in introducing Prohibition in our motherland have been greatly enhanced by the fact that we derive a respectable percentage of our revenue from the manufacture and sale of alcoholic liquors and narcotics. It is a matter of universal experience that expenditure always tends to exceed income. This is not only true of individuals but also of the State. It is this which has brought about a gradual increase in the number of shops selling drink and drugs all over our country. Every new shop in an area which was formerly without one, opens at once a new and a profitable field for the sale of these injurious substances and places temptation in the way of those who might otherwise have never habituated themselves to their use. Complete or partial introduction of Prohibition implies the loss of a substantial part of the revenue of the State.

It has to be remembered that when Government converts itself into a trader holding the monopoly of a particular article, there is likely to be at least an unconscious *encouragement of the use of that commodity*. The blind eye of officialdom is often turned towards those who defy, social conventions in regard to the use of these articles for, without the indirect encouragement thus given, the revenue of the State would suffer. It thus follows that in order

that Prohibition may be successful, it is necessary that Government should not rely on the sale of drink and drugs for any part of its revenue.

In the past, suggestions for the introduction of Prohibition have nearly always been discouraged on the plea that it would imply the expenditure of smaller amounts on Education, Sanitation, Public Health, and kindred nation-building departments. Certain observations on this aspect of the problem made by the Most Reverend Dr. Foss Westcott, the Metropolitan of India, when presiding at a meeting in connection with the Centenary celebrations of Keshub Chandra Sen at Calcutta, are worth quoting. He said,

In Salem, both Europeans and Indians are co-operating in a splendid way and with remarkable results. It was perfectly true that it was having a serious effect on the revenue derived from toddy sale in that particular district. But, if the people could keep to themselves the money they squandered on drinks, surely they would be able to find means for meeting their educational and other needs.

We who are in favour of Prohibition, contend that it is wrong to look only at loss of revenue and to ignore the tremendous gain which would accrue from the adoption of Prohibition. This measure is bound to usher in a general prosperity which will ultimately be reflected in the revenues of Government. This is what was attempted in our motherland in practically every one of the Congress provinces some years ago. We have come to realise the supreme importance of making a strenuous all-out effort to root out this evil from our country.

I propose to review, province by province, the way in which this problem had been sought to be solved. It will be

found that while every one of our provinces was alive to the necessity of introducing Prohibition, some undeterred by loss of revenue, faced the problem boldly, while one or two either showed hesitation or introduced Prohibition in so half-hearted a manner, that not much success could be looked for from their comparatively feeble efforts in this direction.

The Punjab

As the reduction in revenue which would have to be faced if Prohibition was introduced throughout the province was estimated at 2 crores, the Punjab Government explored other sources of revenue which would compensate the loss likely to be incurred by the total or partial introduction of Prohibition. According to the Associated Press, it had under consideration a proposal to enforce Prohibition in the Hissar, Ludhiana, Lyallpur, and Karnal districts.

- .. So far as the prevention and sale of illicit liquor which is the problem of problems for the Punjab is concerned, a suggestion which was put forward and which seems a fairly satisfactory solution was that private individuals should not be permitted to manufacture or sell alcohol in any form. The State which would thus enjoy the monopoly would establish shops where liquor would be sold at a price low enough to *discourage illicit manufacture and sale*. It would maintain the smallest possible number of shops. Alcoholic beverages would be sold from these shops in original packages and strictly limited amounts to individuals.

The advantages of this system are that, as no profit can be made, no one would be interested in pushing the sales. Then again, as the prices charged would be low, no illicit distillation would be encouraged. The number of shops being small, so much trouble would have to be taken for procuring supplies, that the quantity consumed is bound to be low. Since bars, hotels, restaurants, etc., would not be allowed to sell alcohol, public drinking or "treating" would not be encouraged. The habit of drinking would be checked while the revenue would not be sacrificed entirely. Government would not be forced to incur heavy expenditure for maintaining a large preventive staff.

This system has been tried successfully in Canada, Sweden, and a few other European countries. It would be still more successful if the number of hours during which alcohol can be sold is limited, for this would discourage the sales still further. The experience of England has shown that a reduction in the number of hours does, to a certain extent, reduce the total consumption.

The Punjab Government, if really serious about this matter, could encourage the different municipalities to have recourse to the Punjab Local Option Act in order to introduce Prohibition in all the large centres of population throughout the province. The Municipality of the small town of Kasur, distant about 35 miles from Lahore, has already set a laudable example in this direction to the rest of the Punjab and it ought not to be difficult to extend it further.

It has to be added that the Punjab Government raised the duty on *Charas*, a most dangerous hemp drug, by one

hundred per cent. This resulted in a substantial reduction in the consumption of this harmful narcotic without, it was said, producing any increase in its smuggling.

Orissa

The problem of Prohibition in Orissa is concerned mainly with opium. During the Congress regime, the Excise Minister presented a supplementary demand for about Rs. 29,000 to finance the Prohibition scheme which, for the time being, was to be restricted to Balasore district. In brief, it was proposed to abolish all the opium shops situated in the interior of the district with effect from April 1, 1939. Addicts who desired to secure opium after that date, had to undergo medical examination by doctors appointed for the purpose by the Orissa Government. No one was to be supplied with opium unless he was registered at centres opened after September, 1938. A special medical staff was to be appointed whose work would be supplemented by the medical staff of dispensaries maintained by District Board and Trust Funds. It was further proposed to employ a special staff for propaganda and to stop smuggling. The revenue from opium was about Rs. 18 lakhs out of which Prohibition in Balasore district would be responsible for a loss amounting to Rs. 4 lakhs.

In order to make the experiment successful, the Orissa Government proposed that no new addicts would be registered after the last date fixed for the purpose. Intensive propaganda in favour of Prohibition was carried on with

the help of the Congress and different Temperance organisations and it is understood that this attempt met with success. As satisfactory arrangements for treating the addicts, who were regarded as patients rather than as sinners were made, it was found that they were able to give up the use of opium without much trouble and inconvenience. It is gratifying to note that the fullest possible co-operation was received both from the Excise Commissioner as well as the Collector of the district concerned.

Central Province

In 1934-35, about 13½ per cent of the total revenue of this province was derived from excise. The financial aspect of the problem of Prohibition was complicated by the fact that it is a poor province and alternative sources of revenue are extremely limited. In spite of this, Prohibition was introduced as soon as the Congress Ministry came into power, in certain rural and urban areas. The rural areas included the whole of Saugor district, the Nursingpur sub-division of Hoshangabad district, and the Akot Taluk in Akola district. The urban areas comprised three industrial towns viz. Katni, Hinganghat and Badnera. It is understood that both Hindus and Muslims co-operated to make the experiment a success. Propaganda in favour of Prohibition was carried out not only by officials but also by anti-Drink Committees functioning wherever the experiment was tried. According to the *Hitavada* of Nagpur, the loss in revenue due to the introduction of Prohibition in

these areas amounted to nearly Rs. 1.23,000 up to the end of May, 1938. The Excise Minister of the Central Province at a public meeting held at the Akola Town Hall on the 26th October, 1938, declared, "Prohibition will be extended to the whole of Akola and Wardha districts from January, 1939." From the budget estimates, it is understood that this involved Government in a loss of Rs. 15 lakhs per year.

Assam

- In Assam, the revenue from excise constitutes about 15 per cent of the total provincial revenue. In the past, the people were alive to the evils which result from the use of opium which, even more than any other excise article, was consumed by young and old, rich and poor, all over the province. The system of registering addicts and allowing purchase of opium in stated quantities together with an annual reduction of 10 per cent in the opium ration has done much in reducing the quantity consumed.
- In the year ended the 31st March, 1928, the total issue of opium was nearly 29,000 seers whereas on the same date in 1937, it was about 9,600 seers. During this period, the number of pass holders came down from about 86,000 to about 41,000. The revenue from this source fell from about 38½ lakhs to about 19½ lakhs.

It has been urged that smuggling of contraband opium is very rife and that there are large numbers of addicts who have not registered their names and who obtain their supplies of opium from underground sources. The remedy suggested is intensive propaganda, the laying down of still

more effective checks to prevent any further increase in the number of opium eaters, and the making of satisfactory arrangements for the medical treatment of opium addicts.

It is regrettable to find that, of late, there has appeared a tendency towards increased consumption of alcoholic beverages and the hemp drugs which is reflected in the increased income from these sources. Discontent was expressed on all sides that the non-Congress Ministry of this province neither conducted a vigorous campaign in favour of Prohibition nor took sufficiently drastic steps to curtail the consumption of drink and drugs. We should not, however, forget that the steps previously taken for restricting the use of opium were responsible for an annual loss of revenue amounting to 2 lakhs.

United Provinces

The Prohibition scheme of the United Provinces Congress Government came into effect from April 1, 1938, in the two districts of Etah and Mainpuri. A special staff was posted in these districts to enforce Prohibition and to prevent illicit distillation, smuggling, etc. Small committees of reliable and enthusiastic workers were formed to carry on propaganda. Senior officers of the Excise Department gave talks on the evils of drink and drugs to the general public. The Congress organisations in the two districts, the Rural Development Staff, the Arya Samaj and different temperance associations gave the fullest possible co-operation to Government. The Collectors of the two districts occasionally addressed public meetings to explain the

Government policy of Prohibition and to carry on temperance propaganda. The Minister in charge of the Excise Department visited the two districts and addressed a large number of meetings so that people might understand the views of Government. Intensive propaganda was carried on among Harijans and the Scheduled Castes. *Chowdhuries* of the so-called Depressed classes were approached to utilise the Panchyats' power to punish drink and drug-taking habits. Muslims co-operated whole-heartedly with Government in temperance propaganda which was so successful that, at certain meetings, dancing girls vowed not to touch intoxicants. Milk and tea shops were established to provide substitutes for alcoholic beverages. Music was also employed to provide a counter-attraction for ex-addicts.

In order to prevent hardship, addicts requiring Charas, Opium, and Country liquor were permitted to procure their supplies from agencies opened by Government. Led away by the mistaken idea that they would be very profitable, people in large numbers applied for licences. These were later given up when it was found that the demand for stimulants and narcotics was seriously diminishing.

In addition to enforcing complete Prohibition in the Etah and Mainpuri districts and in the "dry" belt of five miles on their borders, the number of shops retailing Country spirits and narcotics throughout the province was reduced to the extent of 25 per cent. The duty on the retail price was also substantially increased. State-managed shops for the sale of liquor in urban areas in the districts of Allahabad, Lucknow, Jaunpur, and Bijnor were started. Along with the elimination of the profit motive,

the salesmen in these Government shops lost all reasons to stimulate the sale of liquor which declined materially.

From October 1, 1938, Government abolished all toddy shops in the two districts and reduced the number of toddy licenses in the rest of the province by about 25 per cent. In order to reduce the consumption of toddy, etc., the U. P. Government raised the tree-tax by about 25 per cent in certain districts.

After the introduction of Prohibition, people got used to the absence of liquor shops and seemed genuinely interested in the success of the experiment. The most interesting feature was that not only did these two districts go "dry," but also that there appeared an appreciable diminution in the consumption of liquor, Opium, Ganja, and other drugs in the other parts of the province as well. According to the Minister of Excise, the percentages of decrease in the whole province except Etah and Mainpuri up to the third week of November, 1938, were as follows :—
Country spirits 30·5 ; Opium 16 ; Ganja 44·4 ; Charas 24·4 ; Bhang 20.

About 12 per cent of the total revenue of this province amounting to Rs. 80 lakhs is derived from excise. It is understood that the enforcing of Prohibition in these two districts with an approximate area of 3,3000 sq. miles, caused the U. P. Congress Government reduction of revenue amounting to Rs. 2 lakhs.

According to a Government Press Note published on July 2, 1938,

There has been a remarkable decrease in the consumption of intoxicants. Drinking bouts are over and marriage parties are

distinctly sober. All except the most confirmed drunkards who have obtained permits, are giving up their old habits.

Bihar

In this province, Prohibition was introduced in the district of Saran which is about 2,700 sq. miles in area with a population of about 2½ lakhs. The campaign was formally inaugurated by the Minister of Excise accompanied by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad and public meetings in different parts of the district were addressed. The Congress, the Muslim League, and the Arya Samaj co-operated fully with Government. Propaganda meetings were arranged in different villages by Congress. Government provided a lorry fitted with a loud-speaker and a gramophone, for propaganda purposes. The excise staff and police kept a close watch in order to prevent excise offences.

From the Press Note issued by the Government of Bihar in the third week of November, 1938, in which the progress made in the Prohibition scheme for the six months ending in September, 1938, is reported, it appears that the use of Country spirit, Toddy, Ganja, Bhang, and Charas was prohibited. Formerly, there were about 2,000 shops for Toddy, about 100 for Country spirit and about 75 for Ganja and Bhang. After the introduction of Prohibition, their licences were not renewed.

It has been estimated that there were nearly 5,000 toddy tappers, all of whom were thrown out of employment. It was reported that a majority of them betook themselves to other means of earning their livelihood, such as

cultivation, ekka driving, mat and match making, vegetable selling, etc. Some migrated to bordering districts where they continued their former profession. Government also gave Khasmahal lands to some of them to enable them to earn their living by cultivation.

High caste Hindus and orthodox Mussalmans welcomed the introduction of Prohibition. Members of communities habituated to the use of alcoholic beverages, when questioned, always expressed delight that they had been rescued from the evils of drunkenness. All except confirmed addicts were united in their condemnation of the use of Ganja, Bhang, and Charas.

So far as the economic effects of Prohibition are concerned, it was stated that drunkenness in villages was noticeable by its absence. Everywhere, there was jubilation in the families of ex-addicts. Women and children were happy as, with the giving up of stimulants and narcotics, more money became available for proper food and the other necessities of life. The economic effects of the scheme were expected to materialise in a more pronounced form with the passage of time.

In an editorial in the *Searchlight* dated the 7th July, 1938, it was said,

On the whole, the prospects of this prohibition experiment are bright and if pushed with vigour and determination, it can well be expected to meet with complete success. All those engaged in the noble task of eradicating the drink and drug evil deserve congratulation on the results so far achieved.

In Bihar, the total revenue from excise is approximately one-third of the revenue of the whole province. In some districts, the revenue from excise is greater than the land

revenue. Alternative sources of finding revenue are extremely limited, but the Congress Government persisted in following out its programme trusting in the righteousness of the cause.

It will be noticed that the area selected for the experiment was predominantly rural. It has been estimated that the loss of revenue if Prohibition is introduced throughout the province, will amount to about Rs. 2 crores. The Bihar Government was of opinion that the loss of revenue involved by the introduction of Prohibition in the district of Saran amounted to Rs. 3 to 3½ lakhs.

Bombay

The Congress Government introduced Prohibition in Bombay in three instalments. With effect from April 1, 1937, Prohibition was introduced in six talukas, two in each of three districts. All licences in these places for the sale of Country liquor, Toddy, and Foreign liquor were cancelled. The second stage was reached when the industrial city of Ahmedabad and its suburbs went "dry" with effect from June 20, 1938. Prohibition was sought to be made successful by propaganda, vigilance, provision of counter-attractions and substitutes, and constructive work to remove the underlying causes of the drink and drug habits. For propaganda purposes, meetings and conferences of caste organisations and religious bodies, cinema and magic lantern shows, and the distribution of leaflets regarding the evil effects of drink and drugs were utilised.

Vigilance Committees were organised for the prevention and detection of illicit traffic in liquor and drugs. Arrangements for providing recreation centres where ex-addicts could come together for reading, playing indoor-games, hearing music, etc., were gradually made.

At Ahmedabad, licences for the retail sale of Country liquor, Toddy, and Foreign liquor were not renewed, with the result that all shops dealing in these articles were closed down. Licences for the sale of Opium, Ganja, Bhang, and Charas, were discontinued but permits for the personal use of these articles by addicts were issued under special circumstances. From an editorial in the *Statesman* of July 28, 1938, it appears that though Ahmedabad has a population of nearly 6 lakhs, only 205 permit applications were submitted, the most striking thing being that there was not a single mill-worker or Harijan among the applicants. This is remarkable in view of the fact that these are the people who have hitherto been in the habit of using alcohol in large quantities.

In the city of Bombay itself, the operation of Prohibition assumed the form of closing all excise shops in the city and the island of Bombay on the monthly pay-day and also on the day after pay-day. The Congress Government of Bombay seemed to hold the view that though both Ahmedabad and Bombay are industrial cities, there are certain differences between the two which called for different policies. Enquiries made by the Bombay Government disclosed that the consumption of Toddy and Country liquor in the mill-areas is heaviest on pay-day and the day after. Government therefore declared these two to be "dry".

days in order to remove the temptation to waste money on these days thus saving the mill hands from misery.

It has been estimated that the cost of introducing complete Prohibition in this province would be approximately 6 crores. Under the Congress scheme, the loss for introducing Prohibition was between 15 to 20 lakhs per year. The simultaneous introduction of Prohibition in six taluks and two very large cities meant a heavy strain on the finances and one cannot but feel admiration for the courageous way in which the problem was tackled by the Bombay Congress Government.

Madras

Madras has the highest percentage of revenue from excise in the whole of India. In 1934-35, 27.1 per cent of the total revenue was derived from drink and drugs. Under the leadership of Sriji Rajagopalcharia, Prohibition came into operation from October, 1937. Salem was the first district selected for the experiment mainly because it was here that alcoholic beverages yielded the largest revenue. It was really a fine instance of courage to select the worst district for this purpose,

My information is that the district of Salem is about 7,100 sq. miles in area, that it has more than 1,800 villages and thousands of hamlets, that the population numbers about $2\frac{1}{2}$ million of whom nearly $7\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs were habitual users of Toddy, Ganja and Opium.

From what I have been able to gather, I find that the Madras Government adopted three measures for making

Prohibition a success. Detection of offences against excise laws was not entrusted exclusively to the Excise staff. In addition to special Prohibition staff, ordinary police, village officials, and taluq and village Prohibition Committees were requested to help in the detection of offences against excise laws. The work of propaganda was carried through Prohibition Committees and non-official organisations. To prevent depression and brighten village life, bhajans, street dramas, etc., were organised. Rural sports and games were introduced with the co-operation of the Y.M.C.A. The Collector of the district, a European I.C.S., in his first report on the working of the scheme dealt with the period October to December, 1937. Commenting on the improvement in the home-life of ex-drinkers, he stated that domestic quarrels of the violent sort had practically ceased and that there had appeared marked improvement in the condition of women and children. So far as the economic condition of the people is concerned, it was stated that improvement in the standard of life had been most marked in regard to both the quantity and quality of food consumed. With reference to industrial labour, it was found that attendance had become regular and quarrels less frequent. Women labourers were no longer sickly, dirty, and clad in rags. Jewellery which had been pledged had been redeemed while children were better clad and were cleaner.

The Collector summed up his impressions as follows :

Viewing generally the effect of Prohibition on the lives of the people, I am convinced, after three months' experience, that Prohibition is proving a great boon to the poorer classes in this district. Leading as they do a hand-to-mouth existence, they

simply cannot afford the expensive luxury of drink, which used to reduce the small earnings of labouring classes to a miserable pittance, quite insufficient for the proper maintenance of a family. Drink brought misery in the shape of domestic unhappiness, insufficiency of food and crushing debt. Already in thousands of homes in the district, conditions have changed to a remarkable extent. Domestic brawls have ceased, a sufficiency of food is available and the grip of the money-lender has relaxed.

Research scholars working under the direction of Dr. P. J. Thomas, then Head of the Department of Economics, Madras University, prepared and submitted a report on the social and economic benefits resulting from the enforcement of Prohibition. This throws a flood of light on the valuable advantages derivable from it. Below are quoted two small paragraphs from it.

The spending power formerly used for drink has been devoted largely to a more varied and adequate diet, better clothes, and more amusements. There has been a significant change in the items of food used by the working classes especially in Salem town. The expenditure on tea and coffee, vegetables, curds, ghee, oils, and meat has increased.

The whole of the extra spending power, however, has not been used for immediate consumption; several of the former drinkers have saved sums for purchasing ornaments and brassware and for repaying debt. Borrowings among labourers have been less this year (1938), largely due to the banishment of drink from marriages and other feasts. This will have healthy reactions especially among agriculturists.

The total expenditure for the introduction of Prohibition in Salem amounted altogether to Rs. 26 lakhs. Undeterred by this increased expense, the Madras Government introduced Prohibition in two other districts viz. Chittoor and Cuddapah from October, 1938, that is, just one year after the commencement of the experiment at Salem. The Collector of Chittoor described the effects of the working of this scheme late in November, 1939, in the following terms :

The vast majority of the people hail prohibition as a real boon. Even the few addicts who find themselves deprived of drink within easy reach will, no doubt, consider this a blessing as the craving wears off. Women specially welcome prohibition.

The Collector of the other district also submitted more or less an identical report on the working of Prohibition in his district for the first month, namely, October, 1938.

I am filled with admiration when I think of the courage with which the solution of the problem was taken up and the situation faced. I am more than happy that the anticipated loss of revenue did not act as a deterrent against the introduction of Prohibition. I have nothing but the deepest respect for the man who had the courage to initiate this policy first of all in India and for the members of his Cabinet who did not stand in his way. I also tender my compliments to those Government officials whose loyalty made the actual working such a success and to those non-officials without whose co-operation the work would have most certainly taken a longer time and caused higher expenditure.

If India is ever in a position to demonstrate the possibility of introducing Prohibition successfully to the rest of the world, then it is equally true that Madras has shown the way to India. I wish that this distinction had been ours in Bengal. There was a time when India followed where Bengal led. Alas for us that we have lost that position. I am not, however, sorry when I see what Madras has done. Though Bengal has been defeated, she has been defeated by a worthy rival and so long as all of us serve the motherland, what does it matter who leads the way and who follows? Unfortunately, under a reac-

tionary, vacillating, communally ridden ministry, more anxious to secure stability than to serve the country in a really useful way, our experience in this direction has been most disappointing.

Bengal

After having considered the steps adopted by a majority of the different provincial governments for introducing Prohibition, let us find out what was done in this direction in Bengal. It has been said that comparisons are odious to gods and men and yet it is the only way to arrive at any correct estimate of what was done. To take one example only, that of Country spirit, we find that in 1935-36, the revenue from this source in this province was 38.21 lakhs ; in 1936-37, it was 42.81 lakhs ; in 1937-38, it was 52 lakhs ; and, according to subsequent Budget estimates for Bengal, the income from this source is not expected to fall. It thus appears that in the three years 1935-38, the revenue from Country spirit increased to the extent of 33.3 per cent approximately. I shall now try to show the three different ways in which our so-called popular cabinet sought to increase its revenue by adopting new methods to stimulate the sale of Country spirit.

The old Government sought an increase in its income. Therefore with effect from July, 1, 1934, the duty on Country spirit was reduced. The retail price immediately went down by $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent to 25 per cent. The amount consumed and, with it, the revenue of Government from

excise went up. It is dreadful to think that this attempt to encourage the sale of Country spirit by a reduction in the retail price met with such regrettable success and that, as a consequence, there is wide diffusion of the evil effects of alcoholism in places and among people where previously it had been comparatively rare. We all thought that as soon as we had an elected and popular ministry, the duty would be raised to its former amount.

The Country spirit sold in Bengal is of different alcoholic strengths. It is surprising to find that one and the same Country liquor is sold at one price in comparatively well-to-do places like Calcutta, Howrah, or the jute mill areas close to Calcutta and that the same kind of Country spirit containing the same amount of alcohol is sold at two-thirds to one-half of the price in poorer districts such as Birbhum, Bankura, and Midnapur. In this way, the pockets of all classes of drinkers are emptied. Even the poorest among them are led to spend some money on liquor. Then again, confirmed drunkards are thus tempted to buy their liquor in those places where the price is lower and to bring it to Calcutta. But if this is detected, they are punished for breach of excise law. Government is responsible for tempting them, in spite of which it feels no compunction in punishing them for breaking the law.

From the 27th September, 1937, a new and very cheap variety of Country spirit was introduced. Responsibility for this lies with the popular and elected ministry of Bengal. I have been told that this is sold at about $4\frac{1}{2}$ annas per bottle, and that one bottle is sufficient to make a man dead drunk. On account of its cheapness,

this is bought in very large quantities and is spreading drunkenness among the poorest of the poor.

Taking these three facts into consideration, viz. the reduction in duty leading to an appreciable reduction in the retail price of Country liquor, the policy of fixing the price of the same kind of liquor at different rates in different places in such a way as to meet the economic condition of all classes, and lastly, the introduction of the new and cheap variety of Country spirit, one is justified in thinking that they explain the larger consumption of liquor and the greater increase in the revenue derived from Country spirit we have seen within recent years. This is how the Bengal Government tried to discharge its duty towards the people of the province. Such callousness one does not expect from one's own countrymen.

The Bengal Government announced that, with effect from the 1st April, 1938, Prohibition would be introduced as an experimental measure in the district of Noakhali and that if it met with success, this policy would be gradually extended to the whole of Bengal. When this was published for the information of the public, there were many who entertained very high hopes about the abolition of drunkenness in our province. But an examination of actual facts had very soon the effect of dispelling the hopes which had been so fondly cherished.

From one of the latest Excise Reports it appears that in the district of Noakhali there are altogether 39 Excise shops. Of these 15 are Ganja, 15 Opium, and 3 Bhang shops. Of the remaining six shops, 2 sell Foreign and 4 Country liquor. The Bengal Government abolished

4 Country spirit shops which, according to the Excise Report referred to just now, sold on the average about 104 London Proof gallons per year and also the 2 Foreign liquor shops which together yielded an annual revenue of Rs. 71/- only which shows that they exist in name alone and for the convenience of chance European visitors. I am told by an old pupil who understands such matters that, on the average, each Country spirit shop in this district sells 9 gallons or 36 bottles per month, that is, one bottle daily per shop. The excise revenue from these shops is about Rs. 3,500/- per year.

The district of Noakhali is inhabited by a predominantly agricultural Muslim population very orthodox in its outlook. The consumption of alcohol in any form is hateful to these people. This is proved by the fact that, in this district, there is not a single Toddy shop. There are only 4 Country spirit shops in an area of about 3,024 square miles with a population of about 40 lakhs. This gives one Country spirit shop for every 756 square miles, and one Country spirit shop for every 10 lakhs of population. For all practical purposes, it is a district where Prohibition, so far as alcoholic beverages are concerned, is already in full force. Taking Bengal as a whole, the average incidence for excise per capita per year is Rs. 0-4-3½ while in the district of Noakhali it is 3 pies per head per year. Let it be remembered that even this very minute and almost negligible amount includes the expenditure incurred for all varieties of excise articles such as Opium, Ganja, Bhang, Foreign and Country spirits. If the amount spent per head per year on Country spirit only is calculated,

it will be less than one-sixth of a pie per head per year.

I would ask whether, under these circumstances, it is worth while starting the experiment at Prohibition in this kind of area. The figures I have quoted, all taken from official sources, are sufficient to prove that Noakhali so far as alcoholic beverages are concerned is practically "dry". So far as the sale of excise articles is concerned, we find that the demand lies in other directions, viz. in Opium, Ganja, and Bhang, which yielded a revenue of about Rs. 27,000/- that is to say, roughly nine times the income derived from Country spirit. I contend that if it is considered desirable to introduce Prohibition in this particular area, it should have taken the form of putting a stop to the sale of these narcotics.

The attitude taken by the Minister in charge of Excise in Bengal reminds me of the old Roman God Janus who is credited with having two faces. The country demands Prohibition—a fact the significance of which was realised by the Finance Minister who, on page 16 of his 1939 Explanatory Memorandum, told us that further increase from this source can no longer be expected. "All-right", says our Excise Minister, "We shall please these troublesome people by introducing Prohibition in one district" and straightway he chooses the one district which yields the smallest revenue and, even there, he picks out the one particular item which again is not likely to be a source of serious loss. "But", says the Finance Minister, "What about revenue? We have all along derived about 12 per cent of our revenues from this particular source". "Do

not fear", says the Excise Minister, "I shall solve your difficulty. The remedy for this is the introduction of the new Country spirit which is so cheap that any one will be able to get drunk at a cost of $4\frac{1}{2}$ annas only". Let the poor and the ignorant workers be plunged deeper into misery, degradation, and suffering. Let their wives be beaten, let their children be half-starved, and go naked so long as our revenue goes up.

One thing more has to be said. It will appear from the report of the Excise Department referred to previously that, after the introduction of Prohibition, licenses for the sale of alcoholic beverages only were granted to 39 new shops in our province. From the answer to a question I put to the Excise Minister, it appears that the revenue from these new shops amounts to more than the sum of one lakh per year. This is in addition to the usual income under this head. It is thus that the trifling loss of about Rs. 3,500/- per year involved by the introduction of this so-called Prohibition in Noakhali has been more than made up.

It is held by some that the selection of what may be called "dry" Noakhali is due to extreme timidity. If so, what a contrast to the bold policy followed by other provinces and specially Madras which selected Salem, a district notorious for drunkenness. "The faint heart", it has been said, "has never won fair lady". Is it not likely, it may be asked, that such excessive want of confidence in dealing with the excise problem may defeat the object sought to be attained? Others, less charitable, hold that this is merely an attempt to throw dust into the eyes of the public.

Whatever the explanation, all must admit that if sincerity in the matter of introducing Prohibition is to be judged by the amount of revenue proposed to be sacrificed, then indeed the Bengal Government made a very poor show.

Madras introduced Prohibition at a cost of 26, Bombay at a cost of 15 to 20, Bihar at a cost of 3 to 3½, the United Provinces and Assam at a cost of 2, the Central Province at a cost of about 1½ lakhs and Orissa at a cost of 4 lakhs per year. My province, Bengal, has sacrificed about Rs. 3,500/- per year and, in the meantime, has somehow managed to get an additional one lakh as excise revenue. I cannot find words to give adequate expression to the sense of shame and disgust which fills me when I consider the contemptible show made by my province and the lack of zeal in the matter of improving the moral and the economic condition of the masses through the introduction of Prohibition. Let it be mentioned further that the sum proposed to be sacrificed *annually* was less than the salary and different allowances drawn *monthly* by one particular member of the then Cabinet.

I have discussed here only the question of the consumption of Country spirit and have not attempted to touch the problem of Prohibition as it affects the use of Toddy, Pachai, Foreign liquor, Opium, Ganja, Bhang and Charas. Let me assure my readers that the indifference of the Bengal Government in so far as these are concerned is tending to increase their consumption. Facts, all gathered from official publications, go to show that the consumption of Country spirit has been on the increase as also that it

is likely to increase still further. This is the position in our province after all the drum-beating and advertisement inflicted on a long-suffering and too credulous public. I am tempted to remind those who will do me the honour of reading these lines of the proverb, familiar probably to most of them, "Behold the mountain was in labour, and it brought forth a mouse!"

CHAPTER XI

PROHIBITION IN MADRAS

Sometime about the middle of 1938, I received by post a pamphlet on Prohibition, the writer of which after pointing out in detail the difficulties which stand in the way of introducing this measure in our motherland, insinuated that Prohibition as introduced by the Congress Government of Madras was a failure. The orders of the Madras Government were that palm trees could be tapped if the vessels used for collecting the juice were coated inside with an amount of lime sufficient to prevent fermentation. The writer expressed the view that this rule was being broken extensively with the result that toddy continued to be used as widely as before and further that the officers of the Prohibition Department were condoning this systematic defiance of Government orders.

I must confess that, as an ardent prohibitionist, I was greatly discouraged when I read this pamphlet. It had emanated from what I considered a responsible quarter and I was shocked at what at the first sight appeared to be downright dishonesty on the part of the Madras Government controlled by a set of people for whom I had hitherto entertained nothing but admiration and respect. I, however, determined to reserve my judgment till I had ascertained by personal enquiries how far the charges brought against the Madras Government were true. My

opportunity came when I was invited to preside at the All-India Conference of Indian Christians which met at Madras on the last two days of 1939.

During the two nights and one day taken up by the journey from Calcutta to Madras, I had the opportunity of coming into contact with at least half a dozen highly educated gentlemen of South India—natives of Andhra Desa, Tamil Nad, Kerala, Travancore, and Cochin. I inquired of all of them what they thought about the success of Prohibition in Madras. All of them were unanimous in stating that the experiment had proved an unqualified success.

I was not, however, content with what I had heard from my fellow travellers and immediately after my arrival at Madras, I established contact with a number of educated, cultured and economically prosperous Christian Indians who also gave me glowing accounts of the beneficial effects of the introduction of Prohibition. After our Conference had finished its sittings, I enjoyed exceptional opportunities of coming into social contact with my Hindu brethren, both Brahmin and non-Brahmin, as also some Muslim gentlemen occupying very high positions. These too were equally enthusiastic in their praise of the action of the Congress Cabinet. It is a matter of common knowledge that there are differences of opinion on certain matters between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins in South India. I was gratified to find that whatever their differences in other directions, in this one matter there was absolute unanimity.

My next step was to test the accuracy of the report I

had received by trying to ascertain the true facts from people who had actually taken part in the campaign and who were still interested in the work. I had in my audience in the various addresses delivered at Madras during my stay there, Intermediate, Degree and Post-Graduate students. In the College of Physical Education, I found students belonging not only to the Madras Presidency but also others hailing from such widely separated and distant parts of India as Punjab, U. P., Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Bombay, and the Central Provinces. Some of these students who had taken an active part in making the campaign against toddy such a success, spoke very highly of the efficient organization created through the energy and the public spirit of Mr. Rajagopalacharia, the Premier of Madras, and Mr. V. I. Munuswami Pillai, the Minister in charge of Excise. Some of the students I met have their homes in Salem or in adjoining districts. The evidence of all classes of students led me to the conclusion that the experiment at Prohibition had been eminently successful. The evidence of two students who had taken part in the enquiry made by Dr. P. J. Thomas, Head of the Department of Economics, Madras University, was very valuable as they had tried to assess, from a scientific and detached point of view, the effects of Prohibition on the economic condition of ex-drinkers in Salem district.

It took me nearly a fortnight to gather my data and other relevant facts which I am placing before my readers so that they may be in a position to understand the technique evolved, the propaganda methods followed, and the moral and economic results achieved by this notable

experiment in the social organisation of such a large area as the district of Salem.

Prohibition In Salem—Its Difficulties

Of all the provinces in India, the Madras Presidency, in years previous to the introduction of Prohibition, enjoyed the unenviable reputation of deriving the highest percentage of its revenue from Excise. This amounted to as much as 27.1 per cent of the total provincial revenues in 1934-35. Then again, among all her districts, the district of Salem was notorious for its drunkenness. When the Congress came into power, Mr. C. Rajagopalacharia, who has lived in this district over a quarter of a century, selected it for this noteworthy experiment. In the course of an interview he granted to me, he explained that this was the reason which had impelled him to select Salem. His contention was that if he could demonstrate to the world that it is possible to introduce Prohibition in a place like Salem where every village, hamlet, and hut has its own cluster of palm trees which may be tapped easily for toddy without much fear of detection, then it would be easier still to introduce Prohibition in other parts of India where the conditions for success are more favourable.

The district of Salem has an area of about 7,100 square miles, it contains more than 1,800 villages and thousands of hamlets, the population numbers more than 2½ million souls of whom nearly 7½ lakhs were in the habit of using excise articles mainly in the form of toddy. Enquiries made at that time revealed that the expenditure on drink

before the introduction of Prohibition ranged from 24 to 32 per cent of the total earnings of the addicts. Some of them spent as much as 50 to 70 per cent of their earnings on drink as against 15 per cent in Britain. These figures alone are sufficient to prove what a boon Prohibition was to the people of this district as also how difficult its introduction in an area where palm trees are to be found in their lakhs. It has further to be stated that the excise revenue derived from this district only was a little over Rs. 13 lakhs per year all of which had to be sacrificed with the introduction of Prohibition.

One of the first conditions of success in any undertaking of this type is the possession of self-confidence, the ability to foresee the difficulties to be faced, and the capacity to call into existence an organisation adapted to cope with these difficulties. The Madras Congress Cabinet set itself the task of solving this problem.

Technique Of Prohibition

According to my information, the Madras Government was able to make such a success of its Prohibition campaign mainly because it had succeeded in carrying the people along with it. The business of detecting violations of the excise laws was not confined to the Excise Department only. A special Prohibition staff was, of course, employed but its work was supplemented by the ordinary police, village officials, and Taluq, that is, Sub-Division, and even Village Prohibition Committees. In addition to these

measures for the prevention of offences against the excise laws, propaganda was carried on through Prohibition Committees and similar other non-official organisations.

As ex-drinkers on account of the absence of stimulants to the use of which they had been accustomed for years, find the evening hours very depressing, the Madras Government popularised various devices to brighten village life. Many kinds of amusements such as bhajans, street dramas, songs, dialogues, and rural sports and games were organised. Great emphasis was laid on the last of these as they provide an interesting spectacle for ex-drinkers and benefit the younger generation by implanting in them, early in life, an appreciation of the value of physical fitness, of the team spirit, and of the pleasure and profit derivable from healthy sports.

I was privileged to deliver addresses on two separate occasions to the students of the Y.M.C.A. College of Physical Education, Saidapet, Madras. I was also the guest of one of the lecturers, Mr. N. K. Mia, who is a Christian Indian like myself. I met the members of the staff as well as the students and thus enjoyed exceptional opportunities of making enquiries about the work done by the staff and students of this institution in the campaign for Prohibition. Soon after Prohibition had been introduced, Mr. H. C. Buck who was Principal of this institution till his death which took place recently, and the Vice-Principal, Mr. P. M. Joseph, made an offer to the Congress Premier to send out trained instructors from their college as volunteers during the vacation to hold instructional classes in rural sports and games in

the interior of the district. This offer was immediately accepted by Mr. Rajagopalacharia.

With Government sanction and financial assistance, a Summer School was held in May, 1939, at Rasipuram, an important centre in Salem district, where 60 students from adjacent villages were trained in indigenous rural games as well as in some inexpensive Western games. I was informed by one of the student-volunteers that these youths were either Local Board teachers, co-operative workers, or members of physical culture associations. The Summer School lasted for one month and it appears that after their return home, these young men introduced the games they had learnt in their own villages. During the period of training, classes were also held at some of the villages situated close to Rasipuram with the result that their inhabitants were fired with enthusiasm for physical training.

Such was the success achieved at the Rasipuram centre, that the Madras Government sanctioned the opening of four other similar schools in different parts of the district and made a grant of Rs. 3,320 to meet the necessary expenditure. Altogether, about 250 students had been trained up to the time of my visit and as they had come from widely scattered centres, it was expected that, in time, the gospel of physical fitness would be preached and taught all through Salem district.

It must, however, be stated that though emphasis was laid principally on the teaching of sports and games, the curriculum of these schools also provided instruction in village uplift work. Every day, two hours' instruction

was imparted on subjects like co-operation, agriculture, cattle-rearing, bee-keeping, etc. After the Summer School, a rural exhibition was held at Rasipuram where there was a special section for products of village industries, such as pottery, carpets, handwoven fabrics, etc. The next rural exhibition was held at the second centre Dharampuri. This was organised on a more ambitious scale and drew very large crowds. I was informed that in this exhibition, there was a special women's section which attracted a good deal of attention and interest.

The co-operative societies also joined in the Prohibition campaign. They distributed *hundi* boxes to be opened once a month when the collections were credited to the respective accounts. This day called thrift day gradually grew into something like an institution. One of the usual entertainments provided on thrift days consisted in rural sports and games in which the local boys took part. Announcement of the thrift day was made in advance. Depositors brought their *hundi* boxes to the office-bearers for collecting the savings. Games followed after this business had been finished. In this way, pleasure and thrift were combined.

Physical Culture Associations have existed for years in all the towns of Salem district. After the introduction of Prohibition, the members took to visiting the villages and giving displays. These not only provided entertainment for the ex-drinkers but also encouraged village youths to develop strong and healthy bodies.

Condition Of Toddy Tappers

From figures supplied by the Excise Department, it appears that there were about 9,000 toddy tappers in the district of Salem at the time Prohibition was introduced. The Madras Government felt that unless some steps were taken to find some kind employment for these people, some of them might be tempted to continue toddy tapping and would thus frustrate, at least partly, the campaign against drink. A Special Development Officer was appointed to start co-operative societies for sweet, that is unfermented and therefore non-alcoholic, toddy. The members were trained to manufacture jaggery, that is, molasses, out of the sweet juice. By the end of December, 1937, that is after 3 months' hard work, these co-operative societies sold about 20,000 lbs. of jaggery at the approximate price of Rs. 1,000. I was informed that nearly 85 per cent of the old toddy tappers were, at the time of my visit, members of the 60 odd co-operative societies.

At the Congress Exhibition held at Madras, I saw specimens of jaggery varying in colour from dark to very light brown manufactured from both palm and cocoanut juice. I also found that sugar candy manufactured from the sweet juice of palm trees was being sold extensively in the local market and also sent to other parts of India. Fairly successful experiments conducted by the Madras Industries Department have proved that the manufacture of jaggery from cocoanut juice can be undertaken profitably provided its price does not fall to a considerable extent. As, unlike palm trees which can be tapped for juice during

certain months of the year only, cocoanut trees can be tapped all the year round, these experiments have opened the way to the introduction of a new cottage industry which is likely to yield a steady though small income to the tappers. I was also informed that the Industries Department was approaching large consumers of jaggery and sugar such as confectioners, manufacturers of lozenges, etc., so that they might meet part of their requirements from the co-operative societies formed for the production and sale of these articles. So far as the tappers who had not joined the sweet toddy co-operative societies were concerned, my information was that some had left the district, others who possessed land were devoting their whole time and energy to cultivation, while the landless among them were working as coolies.

It thus follows that Prohibition, as introduced by the Madras Government, had not only put an end to drunkenness, but was also responsible for the initiation of a new Cottage industry likely to provide continuous employment for thousands of poor people. The authorities seemed to be of the opinion that the former tappers, who were in the habit of consuming large amounts of toddy, would not suffer economically if they took to sweet toddy tapping. Any loss in their total income would be more than made good by abstinence from their old drinking habits.

Effects Of Prohibition

The implementing of Prohibition in Salem district was in the hands of the Collector, Mr. A. F. W. Dixon, I. C. S.

It cannot be said that, at the beginning, he was very much in favour of this measure. He submitted from time to time official reports on the working of the Prohibition Act in the district. I shall commence by very briefly referring to the results obtained after three months' experiment lasting from October to December, 1937.

With regard to the change in the conditions of home life Mr. Dixon said,

All information received goes to show the beneficial effects of the Act on the home life of drinkers. Domestic quarrels of the more violent sort have practically ceased and the condition of the women and children has markedly improved; there are a good many cases reported of heavy drinkers who have lost their old cravings, whose health and general condition have greatly improved.

So far as the economic condition of the people is concerned, he observed,

Improvement in the standard of life is most marked in regard to the quantity of food consumed. Drinkers and their families now get generally a good evening meal, whereas formerly they often went without anything to eat.

As regards its effect on industrial labour, Mr. Dixon quoted the Managing Director of the Rajendra Spinning Mills, Limited, Salem, who had said,

Most of the workers had been very irregular in their attendance whereas one month after Prohibition had been enforced, the attendance became regular. Before Prohibition, quarrels were frequent in the nights and the Managing Director never got an undisturbed night's rest. He had frequently to get up and pacify the fighting labourers. These quarrels have now ceased and they are leading a better life; production has increased and expenditure decreased. Prohibition is particularly beneficial to the women in the mills. They were sickly, dirty and clad in rags. Now every woman has two or three *saris*, most of them petticoats and 50 per cent of them wash daily. Their financial position has also improved. They have redeemed their jewels which they mortgaged due to extravagance. Children are better

clad and cleaner. Dwelling houses have improved, and lights have been introduced into houses which were formerly unlit.

The Collector summed up his impression of this great social experiment in the following terms,

Viewing generally the effect of Prohibition on the lives of the people, I am convinced, after three months' experience, that Prohibition is proving a great boon to the poorer classes in this district. Leading as they do a hand-to-mouth existence, they simply cannot afford the expensive luxury of drink, which used to reduce the small earnings of the labouring classes to a miserable pittance, quite insufficient for the proper maintenance of a family. Drink brought misery in the shape of domestic unhappiness, insufficiency of food, and crushing debt. Already in thousands of homes in the district, conditions have changed to a remarkable extent. Domestic brawls have ceased, a sufficiency of food is available, and the grip of the money-lender has relaxed.

I shall next refer to the report submitted by the Collector of Salem on the working of the Prohibition Act in his district in the nine months between October, 1937, and June, 1938. The first noticeable feature of this report is the tribute paid to non-officials for their co-operation. In this connection he observed,

Special efforts were made to secure the co-operation of non-officials and the task of the police has been rendered much easier by the widespread co-operation and assistance rendered by them.

After referring to the providing of amusements and counter-attractions such as sports and games, bhajan parties, and radios for the ex-addicts, Mr. Dixon continued,

The most noticeable effects of Prohibition on the lives of the people are the absence of street brawls and family squabbles, improvement in the food-supply, particularly at the evening meal, increased care for cleanliness and the childrens' welfare, reduction in indebtedness and generally a more hopeful outlook.

He concluded his report in the following terms :

Prohibition has now almost become a normal feature of district administration. The memory of drink except close to the borders,

is fading and even the insatiable addict is beginning to find the journey across the border for an occasional carouse an expensive and unsatisfactory affair. The villagers have by now become quite accustomed to the new order of things. Considering the population of the district and the number of former drinkers, it is safe to say that the number of persons who now consume illicit liquor in this district is negligible. Illicit drugs are still coming in, but there are reasonable prospects of considerably reducing smuggling in the future.

Mr. Dixon's last words are worth quoting as they unmistakably show the amount of success achieved within the nine months referred to above. He said,

The success of the Prohibition campaign has indeed exceeded the expectations of even some of the most astute opponents of the movement. Meanwhile, no relaxation of preventive action or slackening of control can be permitted. As yet I see no reason to anticipate that permanent success will not reward the efforts of those official and non-official Prohibition workers many of whom have laboured hard to make the movement a success.

The Official Version

The Congress Government of Madras did not, however, rely exclusively on the report of the English Collector of Salem in regard to the benefits derived by the people of this district from the imposition of Prohibition. They had before them the reports of the working of the Prohibition Act in Salem submitted by Mr. C. Jagannatha Chari of the Department of Economics, Annamalai University and by a number of research students working under the direction of Dr. P. J. Thomas, Head of the Department of Economics, Madras University. These documents which are too long to be quoted here were regarded as so encouraging that, on page 7 of the official publication entitled *The First Year of Congress Rule in*

Madras, the Cabinet felt justified in stating on the 14th July, 1938, that,

Prohibition has had a beneficial effect on the health of the ex-drinkers and owing to the visible savings effected in the family budget and the possibilities of adding to their amenities, the enthusiastic support of women is assured for Prohibition. Employers of labour bear testimony to the greater regularity and diligence of workers. Cases of assault, hurt and affray have declined very considerably and there has also been a substantial decrease in the number of the more serious offences. Land revenue has been collected more promptly and the percentage of arrears is unprecedentedly low.

Extension Of Prohibition To Chittoor And Cuddapah

I was given to understand that, as a result of the introduction of Prohibition at Salem, the Madras Government incurred a reduction in its revenue to the extent of about 26 lakhs about 50 per cent of which represented the excise revenue sacrificed and the other 50 per cent the expenses for maintaining Preventive staff, Development officers, etc. This loss of revenue had no effect in checking the extension of Prohibition in the Presidency. Prohibition had been introduced in Salem on the 1st October, 1937. Just one year after, it was introduced in the districts of Cuddapah and Chittoor.

In his report on the first month's working of the Prohibition Act in his district, the Collector of Chittoor, Khan Bahadur Javada Hussain, stated as follows :

The vast majority of the people hail Prohibition as a real boon. Even the few addicts who find themselves deprived of drink within easy reach will, no doubt, consider this a blessing as the craving wears off. Women specially welcome Prohibition.

He concluded by saying that Prohibition in his district was definitely succeeding.

Early in January, 1939, the Prohibition officer in charge of Chittoor district stated that Prohibition had already proved an unqualified success. In that year, grave-famine conditions were prevailing in the district of Chittoor. This explains why, in spite of the introduction of Prohibition, no definite economic improvement was noticeable in the homes of the labourers and peasants. It was also pointed out to me that, in spite of the prevailing scarcity, its ordinary evil consequences such as thefts and burglary were totally absent in that district. The savings effected by Prohibition were used for meeting household expenditure.

When I left Madras, the Congress Government was arranging to open rural uplift training classes in important centres of the district such as Madanapalle, Palmaner, Chandragiri, and Chittoor and it was expected that the workers trained there would be able to make Prohibition still more popular and successful.

The Collector of Cuddapah, Mr. V. S. Hejmadi, I. C. S., was also of the opinion that Prohibition had become a success. The fullest possible co-operation was obtained from non-officials. The villagers helped Government in introducing Prohibition in their district. Prohibition Committees in different villages were brought into existence and various counter-attractions were organised. These consisted in reading news from Telegu newspapers by people residing in the villages every evening, holding sports in the evenings, and having bhajan parties at night.

The problem of providing some remunerative occupation for tappers, who were driven out of employment in this

district was not a very difficult one. Most of them are agriculturists with some kind of handicraft to fall back upon. There were very few who are landless and these again could easily be provided with land if they applied to Government for this special privilege.

Popularity Of Prohibition

It was hoped at that time that Prohibition had come to stay at least in the Madras Presidency. Just before I left for Calcutta, I was informed that the Municipal Council of Mangalore at its meeting held on the 9th January, 1939, had passed a resolution requesting the Madras Government to prohibit the sale of toddy on Saturdays and of arrack, that is, Country spirit made from rice, on Saturdays and Sundays, in order to restrict the drinking of alcoholic beverages. With this end in view, it recommended that shops selling toody and arrack situated within the municipal area and within a radius of three miles of the Municipality, should be closed by Government order on these two days every week.

My information was that this was a repercussion of the step taken by the Bombay Congress Ministry which had promulgated similar orders for the benefit of the industrial labour of the city and island of Bombay. As a result of this step, the consumption of Country spirit had been reduced in these areas in Bombay to the extent of nearly 70 per cent. It was the experience of the Bombay Government that it is on pay day and the day after that the largest amounts are spent in such an unproductive or

rather positively injurious way. If the temptation to spend money in this undesirable way is removed by closing the shops on Saturdays and Sundays, the poor and ignorant people are left free to spend it in clearing the dues of their grocers and in buying the necessaries of life.

Then again, the request to the Madras Government is on a line with the action taken by the Municipality of the small town of Kasur situated at a distance of about 35 miles from Lahore. It appears that, under the provisions of the Punjab Local Option Act, any Municipal Committee can enforce Prohibition within its own area by passing a resolution to that effect provided that two-thirds of the municipal voters support the resolution at a referendum. The total number of municipal voters of Kasur in 1938, was 12,784. On the 31st March, 1937, this matter was put to the test when 8,818 participated in the voting of whom 8,816 were in favour of introducing Prohibition and only 2 against.

These two instances taken from such widely separated places as Mangalore in South and Kasur in North India have been referred to merely to prove that if the people are left to decide the matter for themselves and if the choice is left to the country at large, there is little doubt that we would have Prohibition. What is required for the success of the campaign against drink and drugs is that no pressure in any form should come from outside, that in this very important matter so vital to our spiritual, moral, intellectual, and economic improvement, we should be absolutely left to ourselves, to decide whether we should have Prohibition or not and if the country demands it,

Provincial Governments which, as popular governments, are supposed to be the servants of the people, should implement their orders or, if that word is unpalatable, the desires of the people. Consideration of the revenue which may have to be sacrificed should not be permitted to influence any Government in any decision regarding this very important question.

CHAPTER XII

CONGRESS LEADERSHIP AND THE AWAKENING OF THE MASSES

There cannot be the slightest doubt that, for generations, millions in India have been insufficiently fed during normal times, that, during times of scarcity, they live on a handful or so of leaves eked out with roots, etc., gathered from the wayside, and that during famines large numbers die of sheer starvation. It is not denied that steps are taken to succour them during famines but these, we know, are not of such an extensive character as to provide substantial relief to the stricken population. Epidemic diseases take easy toll of half-starved men, women, and children who are carried off in thousands. Failure of crops may be due to drought or floods, earthquakes and other natural calamities but, whatever the cause, we do not as yet have adequate means to fight it.

There was a time when *Karma* in the case of the Hindu or *Kismet* in the case of the Mussalman, in other words, the inexorable working of fate, was regarded as an adequate explanation of their state of semi-starvation. As they were not acquainted with any remedy for their miseries, the people had perforce to console themselves with the explanation which suggested itself most readily to them and the adequacy of which they and their forefathers had never challenged.

The Coming Of Railways

But the knowledge of democratic institutions in the West which has spread in this country since the establishment of the British rule along with certain other factors have, gradually and insensibly, forced them out of this uncomplaining acceptance of poverty and misery. Probably the first in point of time, if not in point of importance, is the railway system which now traverses almost every part of India. Any one who has travelled in the third class and seen the various types of men and women using it must have noticed what jostling of castes and creeds is to be found in the trains and how rapidly this is breaking down the barriers of the caste system and encouraging an All-India outlook. Men and women of every faith, nationality, province, and State travel together in their millions. There are expressions of a vague desire for the attainment of a fuller and a richer life, criticisms of public men and the services they are rendering the motherland and, lastly, discussions about the activities of the different All-India organisations for the attainment of political freedom in which the Congress figures very prominently. The constant interchange of ideas has brought about a revolutionary change in the outlook of the masses.

Even while holding a ticket for a higher class, I have, specially in the day, travelled hundreds of miles in different parts of India in the third class for hours at a time and not only amused myself but have also gathered at first hand some idea of the way in which the masses look at our problems by listening to the talk which goes on

constantly among the passengers at all hours of the day and night. Conversation bearing on politics generally starts with the purchase of a newspaper in one or other of the Indian vernaculars in some large way-side station. After the purchaser has had his glance, it is passed from hand to hand and columns are always eagerly scanned to find out what Mahatma Gandhi or prominent leaders like Jawaharlal, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhas Bose, or Maulana Abul Kalam Azad have said. The doings of Mr. Jinnah and Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan, of Savarkar and of Moonje are noted and the steps taken by the Provincial Governments discussed, sometimes with very great heat. Some years ago, I read somewhere that, approximately, seven hundred and fifty million third class tickets are sold by the Indian railways every year. If this figure is correct, it gives us some idea of the immense opportunities for interchange of ideas afforded by the railway system of India.

The Appearance Of The Motor Bus

The motor bus, often a very uncomfortable vehicle as I know to my cost, which has made its appearance within recent years, is opening up many areas which had remained untouched by India's railway system. In every part of India except perhaps East Bengal cut up by numerous rivers, streams, and water courses, it is to-day running on roads, *kutchha* and *pucca*, and conveying the new ferment into the peasant life of India. The passengers

are carried at unbelievably low rates from villages to sub-divisional and district towns and also from village to village. The fact that the villager is no longer compelled to go to a railway station to reach his destination but can often board his bus at his very door is tending to make it a formidable rival of the railway. I know of certain parts of the Punjab, the U. P., Bihar, West Bengal, and Madras where one can tour by bus through practically every part of the country. Here too, we find the same jostling of castes, creeds, and sects, the same discussion of current rural problems, the same criticisms, often very crude, of public men and public activities, naturally with the result of creating a less narrow outlook in the villages.

Travelling by bus in various parts of India has shown me that nearly every literate person provides himself with a newspaper, generally in the vernacular, and, often, with one or other of the monthly magazines in the vernacular. These must be read in the rural areas where reading matter is not easily available and their contents discussed threadbare.

The Cinema And The Radio

Another factor which is tending to shake the people out of their old ways is the cinema with its latest development, the talkie. In these places of amusement, in addition to Western films, we are getting Indian films a majority of which cannot be said to be artistic. Western films of the Wild West type have an appeal for the very young. Western films having a definite sex appeal which are

condemned by Indian sentiment are tending to destroy the prestige of the foreigner. It is unfortunate that Indian producers are taking to the imitation of this type of films though still in a half-hearted way. Some Indian films I have seen are concerned with the doings of historical personages and are definitely popular, celebrating as they do, the heroic achievements of our old national leaders. Another result of the popularity of the cinema has been the stimulus it has given to a cheap form of romantic love—a matter rarely known, and still less recognised, in old-fashioned, orthodox India. But a change has come and we now hear reports of suicide pacts between lovers who are prevented from marrying either on religious or economic grounds. It is a well-known fact that cinemas are now in operation not only in very small towns but also in some of the larger villages and that they visit fairs, large and small, everywhere. The villager, specially the village youth, very often stints himself in other directions so that he might go to the cinema. News of the larger world, naturally in a far from accurate form, filters through these visitors to the remotest of villages and is disturbing the old ways and habits of thought. I was greatly pleased to know from one of my friends living in Bombay that the Congress Government when it was in power had given great encouragement to the production of rural reconstruction films and also that these were greatly appreciated everywhere.

Broadcasting is in its infancy in India and is heavily handicapped in many different ways. We have not as yet cheap and reliable sets suitable for installation in villages

where electricity is not available and is not likely to be available for many years to come. It is true that Government is installing loud-speakers in some areas. My experience in my own province is that, probably on account of lack of funds as well as of other facilities, broadcasting on a large scale has hitherto been used mainly for the purpose of conducting Government propaganda. I doubt whether in the different provinces any responsible person has seriously considered the enormous possibilities of broadcasting as a medium of instruction and disseminator of non-propaganda mass ideas and, if so, whether any attempt on a really All-India scale has been made for utilising it for such purposes. My own observations, necessarily limited as regards provinces of India other than Bengal, has been that it is being used more largely for amusement than for the useful purposes referred to above but let me, at the same time, admit that the explanation for this may be that experience has proved to directors of radio programmes that education through the wireless is assimilated only when very largely diluted with amusement.

There cannot be any doubt that broadcasting will be developed in India by the British administration if it continues its rule in India if only to counter the National Movement when it grows too insistent in its demands, for it offers the best possible way of its getting into direct contact with the masses, a majority of whom are unable to read. No reasonable man can have any objection if Government utilises the wireless to meet the activities of unscrupulous agitators who aim at fomenting discontent.

among the ignorant and superstitious villagers by deliberately circulating false information. If, on the other hand, it is utilised for pure propaganda work, there is always the risk that we may have mass drilling of the type which the world has seen in Italy, Germany, and Russia. But will the Government of India have the courage to allow men like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Jinnah, and Savarkar to use the facilities available even when they are not in its favour in ways similar to those found in Britain when, for example, a general election is imminent or some nationally important issue is under discussion? Only time can tell whether such a liberal policy will be followed in an India which has not as yet completely shaken off its economic and political subjection.

Vernacular Periodicals

As one who tries, as far as lies in his power, to be fair to all, I must acknowledge that our great vernacular journals which sell in their thousands do not ordinarily show much hesitation in bitterly criticising Government measures and also that they are occasionally punished for the too-free expression of their opinions. At the same time no one, I think, will deny that, on the whole, the presentation of news is characterised by both accuracy and fairness in the sense that no attempt is made to suppress items which go against, or are unfavourable to, the declared policy of any particular newspaper though

it is quite likely that the inferences drawn from them are coloured by the opinions of the owners. Published from the larger towns, those in charge of periodicals of this type enjoy all facilities open to English papers of standing and always avail themselves of them. For instance, I know of vernacular dailies published in Calcutta priced half an anna and of some published in Bombay priced at a quarter of an anna till the other day, giving accurate news and comments on current affairs which are quite naturally tinged by the political views of the proprietors. These enjoy circulations ranging from 20 to 65 thousand daily, go to every part of the province in which they are published, and play an important part in shaping the public opinion of those who do not read English.

The really dangerous element in vernacular journalism is to be found in those hundreds of "rags" published from country towns and edited generally by one man who, lacking political vision, generally fans communal passions or inflames hatred against those in power. Such a man utilises information received second-hand as well as rumours which he does not fail to embellish with invention. Sometimes he even goes so far as to fabricate news and serves it up for the delectation of his ignorant readers. The fantastic lies and garbled reports spread through such agencies among the readers and those who listen to them have the effect of rousing discontent and of spreading communal misunderstandings. I am not concerned here with suggesting remedies for this undesirable state of affairs. I am referring to it only to prove that this is

still another factor responsible for 'awakening mass consciousness.

Floating Industrial And Domestic Labour

According to the Census of 1931, out of a total population in India amounting approximately to 352 millions, about 154 millions were earners of whom about 15 millions or roughly 10 per cent were earning their living by following various kinds of industry. In this connection we have to remember that an overwhelming majority of those engaged in industry were village handicraftsmen for, according to the *Statistical Abstract* for 1935, there were in that year in India about 900 factories employing the services of a little more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ million persons. Two conclusions follow from these figures and they are that India is very backward in industries or else why should such a small percentage of her children earn their bread in industry specially when we are importing such large amounts of manufactured goods. The second conclusion is that as out of those engaged in industries in India such a huge majority are engaged in handicrafts, our energies ought to be directed to the development of Cottage industries seeing that they seem to meet our requirements. These things, however, do not concern us just now.

Every one familiar with industrial conditions under the factory system is aware that our labour is generally of the unskilled variety, that it is drawn from the rural areas and that it is of an extremely floating character. What I mean by the word "floating" is that labourers

come to industrial centres, work for some part of the year, and return to their village homes after they have earned a sufficient amount. They never sever their connection with rural life permanently but always return to their village homes from time to time. For all practical purposes, labour drawn from the countryside is rural in its outlook.

The 1931 Census also tells us that about 10 million people in India earn their living as domestic servants. Out of these, about 4 to 5 millions come to towns to work as servants in the households of educated and comparatively prosperous men. But these too, like industrial labour, return to their village homes frequently.

Under these circumstances, there is nothing in the world which can prevent the filtration of urban ideas into the countryside. These men who go back in their millions to their villages scattered through every part of India carry along with them the message of their desirability of adopting a higher standard of living and they must also tell stories of many incidents which, to their knowledge, have demonstrated that once the poor man has learnt to demand his just dues and to show sufficient determination, he is bound to succeed in his attempt to secure higher wages and better treatment from his master.

Change Of Faith And Its Consequences

Added to the above is the profound disturbance created in India by the success which has crowned the efforts of Christian propaganda specially among the outcastes. It is-

a mistake to suppose that these outcastes are to be found among the Hindus alone though, at the same time, it has to be admitted that by far the largest numbers are to be found among them. It is now generally admitted that the convert to Christianity has an all-round improvement including those in directions other than the spiritual and also that his children, almost invariably and without much difficulty, take immense strides in improving their social and economic status. That the gravity of the situation has been recognised by non-Christians is evident from the various organisations for religious propaganda fostered by all the larger religious groups. It has to be said to the credit of intellectual India that it had all along condemned untouchability but nothing effective to banish it had been accomplished till Mahatma Gandhi took the lead in the matter. The Rt. Rev. V. S. Azariah, Bishop of Dornakal, observed in that connection,

The conscience of Hindu India has been awakened, caste's main citadels have been shaken. It is now only a matter of time before they crumble to the dust.

The thing which really interests me here is that the sight of the former Harijan who has shaken off all his old social disabilities merely by the fact of a change in his faith is acting as a kind of catalytic in India's social, economic, and political life. The convert who has lifted himself out of the morass of economic servitude is an object lesson to every poverty-stricken man and the social equality granted to him inside the Christian fold immediately brings to the fore the question of political equality in the matter not only of exercising the franchise but of

enjoying the loaves and fishes which might be available for distribution.

Extension Of Franchise

These, in my view, are some of the causes responsible for the awakening of the masses. In my opinion, however, the last and most important among them is the consciousness of the newly acquired political power which was aroused when we were given provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935 the number of voters being increased at one stroke from about seven to about thirty-six millions. This new and important privilege came to the masses immediately after the catastrophic fall in the prices of agricultural products which hit them very hard specially as the fall in the price of such manufactured goods as they used was not correspondingly low. This suggested an easy method to politicians of securing their support. Some of the more unscrupulous or ignorant among them did not fail to hold out to them hopes of a new heaven and a new earth if only they were returned to the legislatures.

The peasant, long groaning under the tyranny of landlords and money-lenders, at last came to realise that the time had come when he could pay off old scores. Similar sentiments also filled the hearts of industrial labourers who thought that the masters could now be compelled to treat them with greater consideration. The so-called untouchables also welcomed the new-found opportunity of showing, in an effective way, their resentment for the treatment meted out to them by their social

superiors in the past. The British administration was known to the masses through the tax-collector, the subordinate officers of the civil courts who had attached and sold their slender possessions in the past to meet their liabilities to the zemindar and the mahajan, and the subordinate police officers who had always oppressed them. Naturally enough, the British Raj, under these circumstances, was not an object of too much love to the masses. When they found agitators coming among them and drawing their pointed attention to the various disabilities from which they had been suffering without making any kind of complaint, when educated and well-off politicians many of whom had rarely, if ever, thought of establishing contact with them came to solicit their votes, there appeared the stirrings of a new life in our villages and among their inhabitants. They realised that they had an importance all their own in the scheme of life and they made up their mind, it must be admitted in a rather vague and uncertain manner, that they would use their newly-acquired power in ways calculated to serve their interests best.

Enter Mahatma Gandhi

There was one man whose name was a household word among India's masses, one man who had really shown his love for the cultivator, the mill-worker, and even the untouchable, and this he had done when no one could even dream that the time might come when the help and

assistance of these poor and down-trodden people would be worth having.

The peasants had heard how, in the district of Champaran in Bihar, the cultivators had been compelled for more than a century to grow indigo for the profit of planters and how Mahatma Gandhi had fought for them and won their freedom from this oppression. In the Kaira district, Gujarat, he had been equally successful in compelling Government to revise the excessive revenue assessment imposed unjustly on the peasants.

The Bardoli Satyagraha was due to difference of opinion over the re-assessment of the land-tax which took place in 1926. The tax was raised by 30 per cent and was reduced by 22 per cent after agitation but even this was regarded as excessive. After the failure of constitutional agitation, the Peasants' Conference decided that, whatever the cost, the taxes would not be paid unless and until an impartial tribunal was appointed or the enhancement cancelled. Then followed imprisonments, confiscations, and other kinds of oppression but to no effect. Last came an inquiry as the result of which there was a very substantial reduction in the assessment. This no-tax campaign had its repercussions in other provinces such as the Punjab and the Central Provinces, the most important result being the precious gain of a new-found dignity in the agriculturist.

So far as industrial labour is concerned, Mahatma Gandhi had carried on a successful campaign for the mill-workers of Ahmedabad. When the inhabitants of a large part of Bihar had been faced with economic ruin and actual starvation, it was the Mahatma who had organised relief

work for them on a large scale. His love for the untouchables and the work he had done for them are equally well-known. Mahatma Gandhi had set his face against the exploitation of the masses and had fought against the British administration, the Indian landlord, and the large-scale Indian employer of labour with equal vigour and with equal success and his one aim was that every one, including the poorest of the poor, should have a square deal. It had also been noticed by the masses that, under his guidance and inspiration, their brethren hitherto resigned to their fate, had learnt the value of co-operation and of united action. They had lost their cringing stoop and had developed a straight spine and acquired a new sense of self-respect. Unity, they had come to feel, was strength and now they, poor and humble though they were, could look all including the white and the brown official, the landlord, and the money-lender, straight in the face.

The Congress Programme And The Masses

There was a time when the Congress had touched into life the political consciousness of the rich, the educated, and the powerful ; it had then summoned the middle classes to join its ranks. Last of all came Mahatma Gandhi who had converted it into a mass movement for his call to the masses to join the Congress was responded to by lakhs of the people. The Congress was the chosen instrument through which Gandhiji was working for the benefit of the masses and it was therefore that in every province where

the message of Mahatma Gandhi had gone and had been appreciated, the Congress captured practically every seat it contested.

This phenomenal success of the Congress is explained by the fact that it fought the last elections on a definite programme which, from the point of view of the present discussion, may be summarised in the following terms. It promised,

In the interest of the peasants, a reform of the system of land tenure and revenue and rent, relief to the smaller peasantry by a substantial reduction of agricultural rents, a moratorium for peasant indebtedness, a scaling down of debts and provision for cheap credit facilities.

For industrial workers, a decent standard of living, shorter hours of work and other conditions to conform as far as possible with international standards, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness, and unemployment, the right to form unions and to strike.

The other objectives laid down were,

The removal of legal and social sex disabilities, removal of untouchability and social and economic uplift of the *Harijans* and other backward classes, equal citizenship and equal civic rights for all, the encouragement of *Khadi* and other village industries, and the humanitarian reform of prison conditions.

At that time, the Congress claimed to have on its rolls about forty-five lakhs of members nearly a third among whom lived in urban and the rest in rural areas. The more enthusiastic among these as well as the Provincial and All-India leaders threw themselves into the election campaign and it emerged as the strongest political party in India.

This is how the success of the Congress party in the last election is referred to in the *Round Table* for June, 1937 (No. 107, p. 613). This periodical published from

London can by no means be described as over-friendly towards the Congress and yet it said,

The large majorities obtained by the Congress in the last election are generally traced to the sentimental regard felt for a movement that originated and fostered nationalist aims, to an elaborate party organisation, and to prevailing discontent with the existing order, which the Congress has adroitly dramatised for political purposes. But the party, as the Congress may be called, sponsored a realistic social and economic electoral programme. This included reforms in the land tenure system, reductions in land rent and revenue and a more equitable adjustment of agricultural burdens giving immediate relief to the peasants. The party promised to deal with the question of agricultural indebtedness, and to improve the lot of industrial workers. Untouchability and other social anachronisms were to be removed, and the treatment of 'political prisoners' was to be examined and improved. This programme was wrapped up with a more general policy of seeking to end the constitution and substituting something nearer to Indian aspirations, but there is no doubt that the practical programme of the party made a strong appeal to the less sophisticated electors. The election results proved that the Congress had deep-rooted support in the country; for the new electorate brought to the poll nearly 28,000,000 voters who had never before exercised the franchise. It was clear that these electors were willing to give the Congress an opportunity to carry out its programme in the legislatures.

When the Congress Ministries came into power in the provinces, it was realised that they were trying, within the limits imposed on them by the Government of India Act, 1935, to carry out the programme of Mahatma Gandhi to ameliorate the lot of the masses. All of them initiated agrarian, industrial, and debt legislation, introduced Prohibition mainly for their benefit, spent larger amounts than before for encouraging primary education, improving sanitation and public health facilities, and took steps for the abolition of adult illiteracy. It is apprehended that if the Congress is permanently kept out of power to which it is entitled by reason of its hold on the voters, now

increased a hundred-fold by abdication of it on a question of principle, the tempo of the progressive programme may be reduced.

Any reduction in the pace of ameliorative measures cannot possibly be relished by the masses who, through their representatives in the different legislatures, may make the task of administration very difficult, if not impossible. There is still another undesirable contingency which will have to be faced if the extreme Leftists take advantage of the situation which might be expected to ensue and if they develop among the masses the conviction that only extremist action will enable them to gain their ends. This might lead to their acceptance of communistic principles which would be a very great tragedy unrelieved by the slightest touch of any redeeming feature.

Our Duty As Indians

In the course of the long tours I have undertaken throughout India in my capacity as President and then General Organising Secretary of the All-India Council of Indian Christians, now living as the guest of the rich, now of the upper and now of the lower middle class and, occasionally, staying even with the actual tiller of the soil or the mill operative, what has come to me repeatedly as a shock is the sight of millions of our brothers and sisters, whose eyes are sunken, whose bodies are emaciated and whose hopeless looks show that they regard themselves as beyond all hope of redemption. During my last tour

in Andhra and Utkal, I have seen young girls who look like old and emaciated women simply because they have never experienced the full satisfaction of their hunger.

The late Sir Frederick Treves, Surgeon to the late King-Emperor Edward VII, grandfather of our present King-Emperor, visited India in the early years of the century. He published his book *The Other Side of the Lantern* in 1905, and spoke of what he had seen in India in the following terms :—

Sadder than the country are the common people of it. They are lean and weary-looking.....they all seem poor and 'toiling for leave to live.' They talk little and laugh less. Indeed, a smile, except on the face of a child is uncommon. They tramp along in the dust with little apparent object other than to tramp. Whither they go, Heaven knows, for they look like men who have been wandering for a century.

And these our brothers and sisters are wandering in search of food and clothing and finding none ; they are wandering in search of work and finding none ; they are wandering in search of medical aid and finding none. And their wandering will cease only when we, who are more fortunately placed, supply what they so sorely need. All this has to be changed before the Indian nation can attain manhood. The masses are awake and they have to be led. It is absolutely necessary that the future leadership should be Indian. Our Gandhiji must have lieutenants. The Congress Ministers have resigned but they are still carrying on the good work, begun when they took office and some account of which has been given in a very brief and inadequate way in the previous pages. They need unselfish workers and every one who offers his co-operation helps forward the cause of the motherland. The political

programme of the Congress may not be subscribed to by every one of us but no Indian who regards himself as a lover of his motherland can refuse his co-operation to the social and economic programme of the Congress.

THE END

