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POST-WAR INDUSTRIAL RECONSTRUCTION

THE Government of India, in a communique dated 6th June 1941, have announced their decision to appoint a committee to consider post-war problems of Industrial reconstruction. This is a decision which will be warmly welcomed by every one interested in the industrial advancement of this country.

Since the commencement of the present war, there has been an ever-increasing amount of agitation from several responsible quarters, urging the Central Government to adopt a bold, vigorous, forward and enlightened policy for ensuring a carefully planned and enduring industrialisation of the country. For a second time in her industrial history, India has realised her helpless dependence on foreign imports for many of her essential needs and there has been an insistent demand on the part of the public and the press, that this opportunity should not be lost for mobilising the vast material resources and the potential scientific and technical talent for the industrial regeneration of the country.

At a recent meeting of the Industries Conference (December 1940) the Hon'ble Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar stated that the Government of India could give the commercial community an indication of the kind of industries which may safely be developed during the war and of the nature of assistance they could extend to such industries. This statement is re-assuring. There has been, however, a justifiable feeling that while the Government owing to stress of war, are concentrating their attention on war industries, other industries, which are essential for consolidating the industrial position of India have been either neglected or ignored. Taking into account the vast resources of the country, the urgency for rapid industrialisation and the exceptional opportunity offered by the war, the efforts of the Government, fall far short of public expectation. Addressing the All-India Manufacturers' Conference in Bombay (March 1, 1941) Sir M. Visvesvaraya, declared: "We must impress on the Government that they will not have discharged their duty to the

people of this country by encouraging only war industries which can be in production by the middle of 1942, but, that an endeavour is expected in this emergency on their part to make the country self-contained in as many requirements, both for peace and war, as possible." He pointed out that through lack of organisation, the country had practically stood still and allowed itself to be outstripped by many a foreign country within the last fifty years. "Our resources in men and material, if wisely utilised are colossal. A plan, leadership and an economic drive are the essential needs of the industrial situation to-day and these are lacking." Mr. Shah, Chairman of the Reception Committee of the same Conference, in the course of his welcome address, said that "the best use of the opportunity afforded by the war was not made, except in regard to the manufacture of munitions and other war materials under Government ægis. The fundamental objective of making a rapid stride in the pace of industrialisation was not being attended to with the vigour, enthusiasm and persistence, which the occasion demands." A similar view was expressed by Mr. G. L. Mehta, Vice-President of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, when he pointed out at a recent meeting of the Institution of Chemists (India) that the "authorities responsible for shaping the economic policies of our Government have been under the influence and domination of those interested in keeping their hold over the Indian market with the consequence, that the vital economic interests of India have been subordinated to those of the manufacturers and exporters in the United Kingdom". It will be superfluous to enumerate here the lacunæ in the industrial organisation of this country. The present offers a rare

opportunity for filling them up. To take one instance, the establishment of heavy engineering and machine industries as a step for the manufacture of automobiles and the building of ships is urgently called for. The Government should take active steps for helping the establishment of these industries as a long-range proposition. The post-war period which followed the termination of the Great War, did not witness the materialisation of the great hopes which were raised at the time; on the other hand, the country's markets were flooded with foreign manufactures and the indigenous industrial effort was swamped out of existence. If the Government of India at the time, had only utilised the opportunity of making this country industrially strong and prosperous, the Empire, in its present crisis, would have had in India, a willing and mighty partner contributing substantially towards the war effort.

The Government of India have constituted the Board of Scientific and Industrial Research under the inspiring direction of Sir S. S. Bhatnagar; the Industrial Utilisation Committee has been brought into being as the logical sequence of the fruitful labours of the Board; several important lines of industrial research have been inaugurated; the resources of practically every laboratory in the country, have been utilised for the promotion of technical research. Indeed for the first time, there has been a belated, but nevertheless an earnest attempt on the part of the Government to recognise scientific research as a factor indispensable to the industrial economy of the nation.

During the short interval of less than a year and with the limited and meagre resources made available, the scientific workers in the country, have already justified the trust placed in them. The country

has provided ample demonstration, if any demonstration were needed, that industries can be successfully started in this country provided foreign competition is kept in check. At the moment the country is favoured with a condition of dwindling imports as a result of the European conflict. This is a condition which can be maintained even after the return of peace by the imposition of tariffs and legislating other forms of protection. These are well recognised and widely practised measures which are adopted by enlightened governments to effectively safeguard a peaceful and ordered development of their national industries.

The public and the industrialists of the country have a heavy responsibility in planning the industrial effort during the impending post-war period. Industrialists should collaborate with the scientific workers and finance researches which have a bearing on their industries. The financial support given by the Government of India is entirely inadequate considering the vastness of the field of research which confronts the country. The Government of India should increase its grant for industrial research and foresighted manufacturers should play their part in contributing towards research not only as a part of their long-term investment but as a social obligation. Mr. G. L. Mehta, in the course of his address referred to above, made the practical suggestion that a substantial portion of the revenues made available from the Excess Profits Tax might be usefully employed for the promotion of industrial research. Research Associations for specific industries composed of manufacturers' representatives and the research workers in the field should be started. This will pave the way for a closer and more

fruitful contact between the scientists and industrialists and both will grow more and more appreciative of each other's point of view.

The Government of India have appointed the Post-war Industrial Reconstruction Committee, which is expected to consider problems of reconstruction in all its bearings. Industries that are now being developed as rapidly and extensively as possible, will no longer be actively engaged upon urgent war contracts; labour, now busy with these industries, will become redundant; there will be a surplus of stocks. In addition to these, the country will have to face keen competition from the industrially advanced nations whose productive efficiency, now harnessed for war industries, will be diverted towards peace-time manufactures. These problems will no doubt receive the careful and earnest attention of the Committee on which financial interests are adequately represented. The inclusion of the Director of Scientific and Industrial Research and the Director of the Indian Institute of Science, both of whom are actively engaged in directing Industrial research, will substantially facilitate the work of the Committee.

In the generous and wise words of Sir Fredrick Nicholson, the Government is "bound to consider Indian interests firstly, secondly and thirdly—I mean by 'firstly' that the local raw materials should be utilised, by 'secondly', that industries should be introduced, and by 'thirdly', that profits of such industries should remain in the country". To quote Pandit Malaviaji: "If measures for the industrial development of India are taken in this spirit, India will become prosperous and strong and England more prosperous and stronger."