

EDITORIAL NOTES

THE ASIAN CONFERENCE

THE Asian Conference that concluded recently in New Delhi promises to be such an eventful landmark in the history of mankind that current science cannot leave it unnoticed. The savants and prophets and scholars and reformers of the fertile East (except, unfortunately, of Japan) had congregated for this historic meeting. One wonders if this is the great meeting that has been prophesied in the Bible.

Addresses were delivered by eminent leaders who have been in the forefront of the fight for freedom in the various countries stressing the indispensable necessity of the independence of each and the mutual support of one another for the social, economic and political development of all if the East has to gain an equality with the West. Spiritually, however, it is recognised that Asia has to give the lead to the rest of the world whose material advancement has far outstripped its moral progress, with a new outlook, a new ideal of life and a correct sense of human values which subordinates the material needs, however necessary, and material achievements, however spectacular, to the moral independence and spiritual glory of man.

At a time when politicians elsewhere in the world are wrangling over petty matters, backing their arguments with threats of atom bombs and bacterial warfare, the message of the East of "Conquering the world with Truth and Love" comes indeed as a cool breeze in the midst of a desert. The inspiring speeches and the unanimity of ideals of peace that were witnessed at the conference provide the hope that an independent, self-directing East will steer humanity clear of the morass of materialism and the whirl pools of power politics which now threaten to plunge the world into devastating war at any moment.

THE INDIAN SUGAR INDUSTRY

THE weak and unhappy position in which the Indian sugar industry finds itself to-day, after fifteen years of uninterrupted and generous protection, is implicit in the recommendation of the Tariff Board to the Government to continue the protection for a further period of one year up to the end of March 1948. The foundations of the industry in India were laid in 1932 by the imposition of a tariff on imported sugar. Fifteen years is a sufficiently long period for any industry to have established itself on a sound basis, and it does little credit to those to whom the destinies of the industry were entrusted to find now that the industry is still unable to stand on its feet. While the industry will ever be grateful to the pioneering work of Barber and Venkatraman and his associates in the domain of cane improvement and cultivation, it is sad to note that processing aspects of the sugar industry have not received any effective attention.

The short-sighted Indian capitalist who has perhaps derived the greatest benefit from the industry, has shown little appreciation of long-term research as a factor in securing its economic stability. There are very few industrialists who maintain competent chemists in their factory, and when they choose to do so, the chemist is employed only for the crushing season. The sugar recovery in Indian plants hardly exceeds 10 per cent., while the corresponding figure for Java is rarely less than 12 per cent., and at times exceeds 13 per cent. And this in spite of the improved varieties of cane which compare in sugar content very favourably with foreign varieties. Thus the Indian capitalist, with the exception of a notable few, forfeited the trust placed in him.

Another aspect of the Industry which has been neglected by the sugar factory owners is the utilisation of by-products and wastes of the sugar plant, the commercial exploitation of which would have naturally served the industry well. There is little research into this aspect of the problem, and less application of even known processes of exploitation. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research which has been spending annually from four to five lakhs of rupees on researches into problems of the sugar industry has concentrated mostly on the agricultural side of the problem. But the dividend-minded capitalist is ever nervous of venturing on projects whose dividend-paying capacity is not a foregone conclusion. The Section of Fermentation Technology of the Indian Institute of Science, for instance, have developed a strain of yeast which yields high concentration washes from molasses and has proved successful in large-scale trials at Daurala and Hargaon, a development which industrialists in other countries would be eager to adopt. Most of the factories in the country, on the other hand, do not have a distillery attached to their factories; the molasses, therefore, goes into the manure heap, thus denying the country a potential source of invaluable power alcohol. In this respect, except for the Governments of Mysore and U.P., which encouraged the production of power alcohol by compelling its incorporation in a certain proportion in motor fuel, the rest of the administrations in India have shown little appreciation of the value of exploiting this by-product to the Industry. It is to be hoped that the Central and Provincial Governments will not be influenced by competitive interests in encouraging, if not compelling, the production of power alcohol from molasses. If indeed the sugar industry is to be put permanently on its feet the administrations must soon make up their minds to encourage commercial exploitation of all the by-products of the industry that are now going to waste.

With respect to this question the Tariff Board has recommended "that the present Central Government grant to the Indian Central Sugarcane Committee of one anna per cwt. from the excise duty on sugar should be increased to four annas per cwt. and that all