

THE INDIAN BACKGROUND

Suggested Changes In Constitution

By Surveyor

PROBABLY the last provincial legislature to discuss India's Draft Constitution, the West Bengal Assembly debated the subject for four days and passed five Congress resolutions suggesting alterations in the draft. Except for one, they are of interest to all other provinces and relate to citizenship rights, Governors' appointments, inter-State trade and financial arrangements. The fifth resolution which is more or less of peculiar interest to West Bengal suggests a change in the clause about the readjustment of provincial boundaries.

In the Draft Constitution, the Indian Parliament is given the right to introduce a Bill to alter provincial territories but subject to the proviso that a majority of members of the legislature of the province from which certain parts are to be separated make a representation in the matter. The West Bengal Assembly suggests deletion of this proviso fearing that otherwise the province's borders will never be altered inasmuch as Bihar, the affected province which is unwilling to lose any part of its territory, would never make the required representation.

FIXED HABITATION

The Draft Constitution lays down that one can acquire citizenship of the Union under the Indian Succession Act. Under this Act one has to live in Indian territory for one year and make a declaration to acquire domicile. It was felt that this would cause hardship to refugees and the Assembly has suggested that one who has a fixed habitation in this country should be deemed a citizen. The alternative method to acquire citizenship is to make a declaration in that respect before a district magistrate prior to the commencement of the constitution and subject to one month's residence in India before the declaration. The Assembly pleads that the declaration may be deposited with any authorised office or officers. The idea here is that a Provincial Government may authorise electoral rolls enumerators to receive the declaration so that citizenship and franchise may be conferred on the applicant simultaneously.

The resolution on the appointment of Governors prescribes that as the Governor is only to be a symbolic figurehead normally, no time and money need be wasted in electing him and that he should be appointed by the Union's President from a panel of four elected by the provincial legislature. As regards power to impose restrictions on the freedom of inter-State trade and intercourse, the West Bengal resolution aims at limiting it to the imposition of restrictions for the purposes of the administration of provincial excise duties or for controlling the prices and distribution of commodities in the national interest. The last resolution passed by the Assembly suggests a fixed share to provinces in the various taxes collected by the Centre and allotment for the first five years of the provincial shares by the Union's President as per the recommendations of the Expert Committee appointed by the President of the Constituent Assembly to suggest financial arrangements between the Centre and the provinces.

FIGHTING CRIME

The police departments of the various provinces are gearing themselves to fight the growing wave of crime. In the United Provinces there were 900 armed hold-ups in the first six months of this year against 500 in the corresponding period of the previous year, with similar increases in other forms of crime. This is described as the worst crime wave in the province since 1918 but already there are signs of abatement and the police force has been increased threefold compared to

the pre-war figure. In Madras, in the year August 1947-July 1948 the number of crimes was higher by 31.6 p.c. compared to 1945-46, with a marked rise in dacoities. Detection, however, kept pace with the rising tide of crime and registered an improvement of 3.5 p.c. Here, too, the police strength is being increased. In the Central Provinces, however, there has been a decrease from the 1947 figure though this year's crimes are still more numerous than in 1946. In this province also the police force has been augmented threefold. The reasons advanced for the increase in crimes are the preoccupation of the police with political and labour troubles, deterioration in economic conditions with high prices of essential commodities and the presence of unruly elements among the refugees.

LOSING PRESTIGE

Front rank Congress leaders, particularly of the orthodox Gandhian school of thought, are pained at the declining prestige of the organisation consequent on the general abandonment of the ideal of service by its followers. Addressing a representative conference of West Bengal Congress workers in Calcutta Mr. Shankarrao Deo said that the Congress was losing its prestige and popularity and appealed to the workers not to fight for positions of power but to continue to serve the people, particularly in countering black-marketing and corruption. If Congressmen failed to bring about a revolutionary upsurge in the country, Leftists would do so and there would be a violent revolution in the country.

Acharya Kripalani said that many of the promises made by Congress leaders before Independence Day remained unfulfilled. He deplored that Congressmen who had undergone untold sufferings were now asking for rewards and lacking all urge to sacrifice. He too made the point that if Congressmen failed to bring relief to the people by ungrudging service to them, Leftists would oust Congressmen and capture power. Dr. P. C. Ghosh said that if Congressmen continued to devote all their energies to securing permits and other advantages to the neglect of their duties, the Congress would lose popular sympathy and its future would be doomed.

NO RESIGNATIONS

Contrary to expectation, there is not going to be any trial of strength before the next general election between the Congress and the Bahujansamaj Party, otherwise known as the Workers' and Peasants' Party, formed by Congressmen of Maharashtra who have deserted the Congress. Five Congress M.L.A.s have joined the party and it was expected that following the example of the U.P. Socialists, these legislators would resign from the Assembly and contest by-elections. They have now been told by the Party not to resign. The reason advanced is that Congressmen were elected last time on the "Quit India" plea to which all adhere and not on any other definite programme and that there is, therefore, no reason why the Bahujansamaj M.L.A.s should resign merely because differences have subsequently arisen between them and the Ministry. It is argued by some that this reasoning is purely casuistic and that the real reason behind sticking to their seats is the party's lack of confidence as yet in its ability to wean the electorate from the Congress. This doubt may be strengthened if the party fails to contest a forthcoming by-election in Satara District. Meanwhile the party will gain a big accession to its strength if the reported decision of the highly respected and influential Satara educationist, Mr. Bhaurao Patil, to join it is confirmed.