
CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO

The Educational Advisory Board.

In 1923 the Government of India abolished the Bureau of Education as a measure of retrenchment and the Hartog Committee deplored this act of Government in order to save a few thousand rupees. When a few months back Sir G. S. Bajpai referred in the Legislative Assembly to the intention of Government to revive the Central Advisory Board of Education in accordance with the recommendation of the Committee, the Assembly suggested postponement of the proposals in view of the forthcoming reforms in the provincial and central administration. If the proposed Advisory Board is to fit into the general framework of federal administration, it is obvious that the Indian States should be adequately represented, for education, which is at the basis of all progress, must always remain as an all-India subject. The Hartog Committee points out that education as a provincial transferred subject has during the past fifteen years made little progress especially in the field of free and compulsory elementary education. The Simon Commission, of which the Committee was an auxiliary body, viewed the problem of education as one concerning the entire political and social destiny of the Indian Empire and the question of the extension of franchise and that of the reconstruction of rural life depend largely upon the amount of benefit which a carefully devised scheme of higher elementary education confers on the general Indian population.

The value and usefulness of the Board do not depend so much on its prestige as on the amount of expert knowledge, experience and industry which its members will ultimately bring to bear on the problems entrusted to them for investigation and advice. The existence of the Board consisting of eminent educationists and representatives of public opinion can be justified if Government recognises the need for advice and provides adequate funds for giving effect to its recommendations. Proposals for the rapid extension and improvement of the educational schemes in India are frequently made in the Legislative Chambers and Governments have frequently pleaded inability to accept the proposals of people's representatives on account of the limited provision they could make for

education in their annual budget. The realisation that money spent on people's education is in the nature of public investment, must be the foundation of the financial policy of Government, whose first and last line of defence must at all times be a contented, prosperous and homogeneous population.

The Quetta Earthquake.

The disaster which has overwhelmed Quetta staggers imagination. Those who are situated far from the scene of this appalling catastrophe may not be able to comprehend the straits to which this frontier military station has been reduced by the earthquake. We have great praise for the military authorities for arranging efficient and prompt salvage and relief operations, and the splendid manner in which response is forthcoming to the Viceroy's appeal for funds is a witness to the profound and universal sympathy evoked by this holocaust. It is unofficially stated that there must be a death roll of 65,000 people.

Premonitions of the coming disaster were not wanting. Since the earthquake which convulsed Bihar last year, earth tremors were reported from various places and they were continually travelling westward. It is now well known that practically all Indian earthquakes have originated from the peripheral tracts of the Indo-Gangetic plain, at the foot of the great Himalayan mountain system. This belt of country is a zone of weakness and strain in the underground rocks, due to the severe folding and crumpling to which they have been subjected in the process of the elevation of the Himalayas. Now and again in some place or other along this belt, where the pressure exceeds a certain limit, the rocks readjust themselves and every such readjustment is accompanied by an earthquake of smaller or greater intensity.

The recent disaster which shattered Quetta is an example of such a tectonic earthquake. The underground geological structure of the rocks in the country affected by the upheaval is to a certain extent indicated by the nature and disposition of the hill ranges in the area. Geologists have pointed out that the several mountains of Baluchistan belong to the same system as the main mass of the Himalayas, and they really

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form a part of one great family of mountain chains. A glance at the physical map of Baluchistan shows that the Sulaiman range forms an important line of hills running north and south. At its southward end, the range takes a western bend forming the Bugti hills, and then it soon turns northwest giving rise to the Marri hills, extending along the Bolan pass to as far as Quetta. At this point there is a sharp hairpin bend in the alignment of the hill ranges and we have, to the south of Quetta, the Brahui and the Kirthar mountains running due north and south. In a region of compression like the area covered by this plexus of hill ranges showing abrupt flexures and lying under severe strain, any increased stress must naturally result in a severe convulsion of the earth's surface. To the east of the present scene is the great Kachhi plain where an earthquake of great magnitude took place in 1909. The belt of the greatest havoc in the case of the recent earthquake runs roughly north and south extending

over an area of about 70 miles long and 16 miles broad, including important and populous towns such as Quetta and Mastung. This will give us an idea of the epicentral area, where rocks of varying degrees of hardness and of different ages are known to occur, constituting the Baluchistan Mountain System. It is well known that "faulting" in rocks is the commonest type of movement which gives rise to earthquakes, and the probability is that it is a dislocation of this type that has been responsible for the Quetta Earthquake.

A more definite diagnosis of the cause of this earthquake must await a thorough and detailed geological investigation which has already been initiated by the Geological Survey of India.

Within recent times earthquakes have become an epidemic, and places like Quetta, one of the foremost R.A.F. base headquarters of the Western Command, where there must necessarily be large ammunition depots, need special protection.

NEWS

HOW REVOLUTIONARY IS THE COMPUTER?

... "It is probable that the new revolution in computers is proceeding rather more quickly than did the old one in electricity. About 25 years passed between Volta's pioneering work on the electric battery and the first great chemical discoveries of public impact. The development of a sizable computer industry from the first transistor took less than half that time, perhaps 15 years at most. Seventy-five years after Volta, the world was entering quite a new age, with the magic touch of Thomas Alva Edison and his invention factory. If we assume that we have a similar sort of high-tech revolution moving at something like twice the speed of the first one, we are now in a period corresponding roughly to the time of Edison. The analogues of the beginning of electronics are not due in the computer revolution until about the year 2000. History does not in any sense repeat itself; all we are doing is supposing on reasonable evidence that we have the same sort of phenomenon in process once again. But I feel we ought to draw a lesson from the

way in which each development of the first high-tech revolution in electricity was leading to worlds unimagined when they were already beginning to happen. Many people make the mistake of thinking that the computer is just some single invention that is progressing bit by bit. We are not, however, dealing with a single, improving invention, like the sewing machine. We are in the midst of a general revolution. We cannot expect the computers of 2000 to be an extensional of those of today, no more so than a television set is a glorified Morse code telegraph."

[(Derek J. de Solla Price in *OMNI* 7(5):8, Feb 85 (See also: E. Garfield. A tribute to Derek John de Solla Price: a bold, iconoclastic historian of science. *Current Contents* (28): 3-7, 9 Jul 84.)) Reproduced with permission from Press Digest, *Current Contents*®, No. 13, April 1, 1985, p. 16, (Published by the Institute for Scientific Information®, Philadelphia, PA, USA.)]
