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State's role in the reconstruction of India's Mineral Policy

THE Geological Societies in India have been organising of late, symposia for formulating a national mineral policy for India. The trend of discussions which have taken place so far discloses a strong feeling for nationalisation and conservation of India's mineral resources for her own needs. If 'nationalisation' were to mean that the Central Government should hold the mineral rights throughout India and own all the mines, several complications are bound to arise. But if it suggests that the rights for minerals as distributed within the territorial jurisdictions of the several Indian States and British Provinces should vest in their respective Governments, the question assumes a simpler aspect. In fact, in most of the Indian States, and even in many of the British Provinces—except perhaps where permanent land settlement prevails, as in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa—the mineral rights vest already in their Governments. Whatever else may be the reason, it is not the lack of State ownership of min-

eral rights which has been the root cause for the unsatisfactory and tardy growth of India's mining and mineral industries.

So far, most of the Indian States and Provinces have left the prospecting and mining of their minerals to private enterprise. Foreign concerns with adequate mining experience and ability to command the required capital, took advantage of this and got possession of some of the valuable deposits of metalliferous minerals, like the ores of gold, manganese, chrome and copper. Many of these concerns generally conduct their mining with considerable skill and forethought, adopting the latest and the most advanced methods. The country, no doubt, has been largely benefited by their enterprises; but it is questionable whether the return it has got is quite proportionate to the total drain of its mineral wealth. Indian capitalists have fought shy in the past of risking their funds in mining, and the few who have ventured on these lines have generally concentrated their attention on raising only the minerals which can be readily exported without any further treatment or elaborate processing. . . .

Among her mineral possessions, India can list, in all about a hundred or so of different types, which may serve for various industrial purposes. It would not pay to export, in their raw condition, many of these which may be classed as common minerals. They may be used advantageously in some one or the other of the several local mineral industries to which each would be found best suited. Among the minerals of international importance which would be required in the world's essential industries, India

may possess a dozen including her high grade iron ores, bauxite, manganese ores, chromite, mica, monazite, ilmenite and a few others. Excepting iron ores and bauxite, India has been exporting the others, till now, in unrestricted quantities; and it is highly doubtful whether we have these minerals in such superabundance—far in excess of our requirements—as to continue to share them for long, as common raw materials, with other countries.

India, in its present stage of industrial development, may not be conceded to be standing in need of a large share of the minerals of international importance; but the country's growing requirements necessitate the setting up—not at some distant future but immediately—of several essential industries which would require them as their raw material. In any consideration for an international mineral policy India cannot stand in isolation, and we do not mean either that she should do so and play the dog in the manger role in respect of her mineral resources. The Government of India, the Provinces, and the States, should endeavour to take an accurate stock of their mineral resources—as suggested above—and decide upon the various mineral industries which each could advantageously set up, so that when the time comes—which may not be far distant—for any considerations of international sharing of resources of essential minerals, India may have her plans ready and show the world her own need for most of the minerals which she possesses and for a few more which she has not got.

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