CHAPTER FIVE

SCIENCE FOR RECONSTRUCTION

As the Second World War brought an unprecedented destruction in its trail and dislocation in every sphere of life, it united at the same time the destinies of the peoples of the world in many ways and brought them closer than ever before. The new world order that emerged out of the global conflict could be sustained only by mutual understanding and cooperation of all. Thus, from the chaos and savagery of the war emerged a growing desire for coexistence, harmony and common good. Initially, this began with the Allied efforts for security but soon led to a range of activities of mutual co-operation at various levels, culminating in the formation, in 1945, of the United Nations Organisation (UNO). These developments had profound impact on Britain and her vast Empire including India. In India, this concern assumed significant political dimensions not only in relation to imperialism and nationalism but also for the advancement of science and technology. Here, the war and the new forces of change it released combined with the local factors to compel the colonial authorities to respond sympathetically to the national aspirations and to use science for material reconstruction of the country. This was an important shift from the colonial policy in the past.

Imperial Initiative in the US Partnership

Politically, the beginning of this shift at the highest level can be traced to the entry of the Labour Party into the National Government in Britain in May 1940.1 A general concern for socio-economic reconstruction was very much in the air in the UK around this time. The subject had assumed dimensions of almost a movement and a fast-growing public opinion focused on social issues and called for wide-ranging reconstruc-

tion with liberal state support. The Beveridge Report on social security was published in December 1942 and a range of government activities were directed towards planning in this regard. An important aspect of these endeavours was an increasing emphasis on using science and technology in this context. Finally, even Churchill found time from his engrossing preoccupation with politics and war to pay some attention to social problems. He appointed a Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction with a Cabinet Minister in charge. These developments made Linlithgow initiate measures for post-war reconstruction in India.

Clement R. Attlee, the Labour member in the National Government, pleaded for making the wartime measures of planning and control a permanent feature so that Britain could develop as a socialist state. Given its ideological orientation, the Labour Party was prompt to express its stand on the problems of the colonies. Attlee was an expert on India and his party sympathized with her national aspirations. So, her socio-economic problems engaged their attention immediately. Soon after the formation of the National Government, Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour (1940–1945), put up a proposal to bring young Indians to the UK for industrial training. The proposal was initially turned down by India Office as well as the Viceroy, but eventually Bevin succeeded, and under his scheme as many as 700 Indians were trained as technicians by the end of 1945. He also helped in finding technicians and instructors to be sent to India to start training schemes there.

After reconstituting his cabinet in February 1942, Winston Churchill sent Sir Stafford Cripps, the leader of the House of Commons and the Lord Privy Seal, to India, with a draft proposal on the political problems of the country. Though Cripps had joined the Commons as an independent candidate, his association with socialism and the Labour Party had been long and close. He was also interested in India and ideologically had come closer to Jawaharlal Nehru even before the war. In fact, Cripps had been invited to attend the annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1936—a rare honour for an Englishman, though he could not make it. But Cripps could not succeed in his

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3 Lady Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan*, 1945.