EDITORIAL

Electrochemical Industries in India

Several electrochemical industries are possible in India. A few have taken root. Electroplating is one line, at least as an auxiliary to other manufactures, which could claim to have been organised on sound lines. Yet, the applications of this scientific art are not as extensive as they could be. The manufacture of caustic soda and aluminium is now taking shape in a big and expanding way. They are both thriving industries, because they are very much needed and in short supply and also because the Government of India is very obliging in the matter of prices. The question is: are these two commodities being produced at costs comparable with their costs in other countries? This could be answered by a counter question: are we producing steel at a cost comparable with costs in Japan and other developed countries. Industrialists and the Government of India have several stock answers to explain our economic ailments. The fact remains that we started manufacturing aluminium, decades ago, in what industrialists and cost accountants in other countries consider but pilot plants. The coming into existence of bigger plants during the last ten years has not eased the cost situation. The problem deserves deeper consideration.

The production of caustic soda on a large scale has received well deserved attention. Industries consuming caustic soda, including the aluminium industry, have expanded; cost consideration has been somewhat subordinated to the necessity of self-sufficiency. It was said at various times that the disposal of by-product chlorine or hydrochloric acid was a problem. During recent years it has been claimed that several uses have been found for chlorine and a certain amount of credit has gone to caustic soda. Even so, in some of the bigger plants chlorine has not been utilised to any appreciable extent. In this context, a proposal, not in any sense original, made some years ago by the Central Salt & Marine Chemical Research Institute, Bhavnagar, based on its pilot plant work, that hydrochloric acid could be utilised economically for the manufacture of sulphuric acid from gypsum is worth consideration.

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