

"The Republic is in danger, threatened from many quarters, both external and internal, and it is time for the common people of India to rally to its defence," said Mr. M.R. Masani, M.P., while addressing the Lions Clubs in the Bombay area at Juhu this evening at an eve-of-7 public D. function.

Calling on those present to renew their pledge of loyalty to the Republic and the Constitution, the speaker said that, while it may be true that politicians in their selfishness and party-mindedness might be taking the country to ruin, the responsibility of the individual citizen for the country's current state of affairs should not be minimised. There were many among the educated people in India who cast the blame for the deplorable state of the country on "they", meaning those in office. This division of the people into "we" and "they" was a false one. Those in office in a democracy such as ours owed their position to the people at large, and hence it had been said that every country got the government it deserved. The daily exercise of vigilance and participation in the processes of democracy were the price to be paid for the maintenance of freedom.

The speaker deplored the fact that members of the business community in India were particularly guilty of neglect of their responsibilities as citizens. He regretted that Bombay had recently lost two outstanding industrialists who had shown qualities of idealism, citizenship and leadership, namely, Col. L. Sawhny and Mr. C. Rai. The speaker illustrated his point by referring to the complete passivity and absence of action on the part of thousands of small depositors and shareholders in banks and policy holders in insurance companies whose interests were attacked in legislation now before Parliament under the garb of "social control". In a real democracy, associations of shareholders, bank depositors and insurance policy holders would have come into existence and campaigned actively against this reactionary legislation which would destroy the banking and insurance services. Short-term selfishness seemed to prevail over patriotism and even enlightened self-interest.

Mr. Masani referred to the external threat to the country's security posed by the unrelenting hostility of the Chinese Communist dictatorship which he described as a "bandit regime." In that context, Mr. Masani was glad that the war for the defence of South Vietnam was being won and the Chinese Communist aggressors on our own frontiers were thus being pinned down and prevented from resorting to another attack as in 1962 on our territory. India owed a debt of gratitude to the Australians, New Zealanders, Koreans, Philipinos, Thais, Americans and Vietnamese who were laying down their lives for the freedom of India and South East Asia.

Mr. Masani listed the internal threats to the Constitution as coming from economic collapse, moral degeneration and corruption, violence and disorder, the Communist threat of subversion as in Bengal and elsewhere, and the irresponsibility of politicians in general.

There was no prospect of improvement in the economic sphere since there did not appear to be any sign of a removal of the two basic causes, namely, bad Government policies and plans and the lack of a capacity for hard work.

With a regime of controls and Permit-Licence-Raj, corruption had become widespread. As an example of the deterioration in the standards of government, Mr. Masani instanced the recent appointment of Mr. K.D. Malaviya, who had been removed from his position as a Minister of the Union Government for proved misconduct and improper behaviour, as Chairman of the Heavy Engineering Corporation in Ranchi where crores of rupees of the taxpayers' money were invested. To expect any improvement in New Delhi was to be totally unrealistic.

The abdication of Government's duty to maintain law and order was resulting

in growing violence and disorder throughout the country. A small minority of industrial workers, students and hooligans were being allowed to hold big cities like Calcutta, Madras and Bangalore to ransom. The shameful incidents in New Delhi on New Year's eve, when women were molested and the police looked on, showed that we had touched a new low in this direction. Even Members of Parliament and Ministers of State Governments indulged in lawlessness and indiscipline as when two Ministers of the U.P. Government broke the law in the Capital and expected to be treated as if they were immune from the rule of law in the country.

"It is time the Union and State Governments stop passing the buck to each other and show some courage in suppressing disorder," said Mr. Masani. There were two kinds of discipline: one was the voluntary, democratic kind and the other that which was enforced by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Mahatma Gandhi had discerned this when he said that only a disciplined man could be a satyagrahi, and that indiscipline and violence were two sides of the same coin. If India could not maintain discipline and order in the democratic way, as surely as night follows day the people of India would lose their freedom and find themselves regimented by an authoritarian regime. Politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum, and a dangerous power vacuum was developing in the country.

It was natural that the Communists should seek to exploit such a situation for furthering their plans of subversion. There was nothing to choose between the two Communist Parties which represented a "clear and present danger" to the security of the country and the Constitution and both of them should be banned.

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Unfortunately, members of the democratic parties were playing the fool. Each Party was interested only in its own advancement and what was meant for the country was being given to Party. While the Hyderabad Session of the Congress Party had shown its complete unawareness of its responsibilities for misleading the country, it was a pity that other parties which were in office in several States were not doing any better. Mr. Masani agreed with Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan that, except in Orissa and Madras, the non-Congress Governments in the States had proved a bitter disappointment to the people and had contributed to the people losing faith in politicians and, therefore, in the processes of Democracy.

According to Mr. Masani, the need of the hour was for a Government of Democratic Unity consisting of people of all points of view, except the Communists, to be brought into existence to save the country. Only such a broad-based Government could do the unpopular things that were necessary. Otherwise there would be constant deterioration. He gave the example of how the Finance Minister had to give in on issues like Dearness Allowance and deficit finance because the present Government had neither the courage nor the capability to stand up for sound financial policies. If a broad-based government of this nature could not be brought into existence, Mr. Masani feared that the country would drift in the same direction as Pakistan, Indonesia and Greece.

It was no use waiting for the politician to save the country. The citizen must assert himself. India still had valuable assets in a peasantry endowed with robust common sense and simple faith, an abundant work force which needed to be given the right leadership, a small but growing group of professional managers and executives who had the necessary knowhow, and Armed Forces that were brave and loyal.

Even the humblest citizen had a part to play in a democracy. Mr. Masani gave the example of the five British girl typists whose gesture in offering to work half an hour extra without pay had started a mass movement in Britain which was called "I'm Backing Britain". Citizens in India should mobilise in voluntary associations to help in maintaining order in their own city.

M. R. Masani
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