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WHITHER INDIA ?

SPR.L. A prominent Indian Member of Parliament, Mr. Minoo Masani, Secretary-General of the most important Indian opposition party, Swatantra, or Party of Freedom, recently came to Berne during one of his rare visits to Europe in order to give an address on the situation in his country as a result of last February's general elections. Coming from a citizen of the greatest democracy in the world, an adversary of the government, yet free to travel abroad expressing his opinions freely, without fear and without hate, this lecture by Minoo Masani was of particular significance to a Swiss audience, always receptive to the development of democratic thought in the world.

Mr. Masani's first preoccupation was to stress the fact that the elections in India did in fact take place; and, whatever else has to be said about the state of India today, the machinery of free elections was able to function last February throughout the country.

What has happened since then? In what sort of situation does India find itself today, when the ruling party, the Congress, has lost so many of its representatives, both in the central government and in the states?

The economic situation is stagnant. Industry is slowing down. The average income of India's citizens is not increasing at the speed required to fulfill the plan. Indian agriculture does not produce enough food to feed the inhabitants of the country, a miserable situation for a country in which 80-90% of the population are farmers. Adequate nourishment of the Indian people depends upon massive imports of cereals from America and elsewhere. For the last five years inflation has been increasing, and prices have gone up by about 35%. Five years ago, 100 rupees were worth 13 dollars, now they are worth only 8. In short, India is threatened with bankruptcy and is having to make great efforts to obtain an international moratorium for reimbursement of its debts. Altogether, this is a dark picture - and particularly so when we remember that India has just celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its independence.

How did India get into this position? And here Mr. Masani lays stress once again on the fact that he is in opposition and that we need not expect praise of Congress from him. The policy of the government, he thinks, is based too much on irrelevant theory and too little on the reality of India. Succeeding governments have had fixed ideas on such matters as the virtues of nationalisation state control, and all manner of ideological commodities. Priority has always been given to industry, whereas the all-important agriculture has been sadly neglected. But heavy industry is intensive in its use of capital not of labour - and India is poor in capital and rich in labour. Masani quotes

Nehru as saying that a little inflation is necessary to economic development ; but today inflation is a more important factor in Indian politics than development.

So - not much success and too much worry and anxiety. Too much concrete and steel, while social and nourishment problems have neither been solved nor seen an approach to solution. As a result, the moral tone of the country has been lowered, partisan interests are becoming more important each day and corruption ever more rampant.

In foreign affairs the situation, according to Masani, is not more brilliant. In the Middle East conflict, there is little evidence that the people approves the official government attitude, which is against Israel. Far more interest and approval would have been brought out by a policy which consisted in working for peace by remaining neutral in the Israel-Arab conflict. On India's frontiers with China and Pakistan, as well as in the outlying areas of India itself, Nagaland, Assam, Kashmir, the situation is dangerous.

This bad internal and external situation was relected in the general elections. Congress suffered a bad defeat - and, everything taken together, this was a good thing for the country, because now politicians who do not belong to the Congress can have access to responsible posts in over half of the states of the Indian Union. But because the electoral system is not based on proportional representation, we have a situation in the central Parliament in which the number of Congress members is far in excess of the proportion of votes that they assembled.

But in the states in which anti-Congress coalitions have been set up, the new governments have been unable to remedy the sorsening situation. Several of these have been rendered ineffective by the intrigues of Communist elements - both pro-Chinese and pro-Moscow.

The central government, still under the sole direction of Congress, has continued to practice the same policies as before the elections. In spite of the loss of confidence they suffered, they are proving incapable of adapting themselves. They remain faithful to the ideas of Nehru - many of which are now outdated, and many others, according to Masani, were wrong from the beginning. Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government has in no wise seen fit to interpret the result of the elections as a warning. There have, it is true, been small modifications in policy, but the government is still the toy of personal interests and party jealousies at a time when important new departures are needed to face an ever worsening situation.

Mr. Masani sees three great dangers for India's future :

1. The deterioration of the economy - the chief reason for the discontent which large sections of the population have been showing.

2. A general disillusionment with politics. The public is becoming genuinely uninterested in the complicated personal machinations of Indian politicians, and it is no longer rare to hear that a dictatorship, though in itself an evil, has become necessary for India. Does this mean a military dictatorship ? Masani was asked. At present, he answered, the military do not think so themselves but whatever they think now this does not change the fact that a political void is being created which will have to be filled in some way. It will most likely be filled in India, as elsewhere, by those who are capable of keeping order - and

that would in fact be the army. Last March, when the new Indian Parliament met for the first time, an agreement was reached between the parties to prevent political conflict getting out of control. But this agreement was never put into operation, and the parties continue to abuse each other as in the past.

3. The final, and perhaps the worst, danger is China. There is an internal aspect to this problem as well as an external one - and this comes principally from the Indian Communists - Peking variety - who are not so much satellites of the Chinese state but adherents to the thought of Mao Tse-tung. This was brought to light most recently in the matter of the peasants' rebellion in West Bengal. The government which organised the repression of this rebellion was a coalition which included Communists of the Peking variety - yet it was accused by the Chinese of collusion with "Soviet revisionism". In instances of this kind it is difficult for the observer to tell whether there are real divergences between these Communists and the Chinese Government or whether they have only a tactical significance.

Masani does not think that China intends to invade India. He thinks that this would be to attribute too much importance to frontier incidents. But it does hope to make India into a good satellite. Whatever the momentary position of the Soviet Government at the present moment, it has a large responsibility in the building up of this process - and many of the texts now used by the Chinese in their propaganda against India are direct reproductions of texts written and used by Soviet propaganda agencies a few years ago.

What India needs, according to Minoo Masani, to avoid the pitfalls that he has been describing, is a coalition government without the Communists - but in which the political affiliation of the various ministers would be of secondary importance. The present time for India is urgent, and a government of 'technicians' should be formed which would put aside both ideological and partisan quarrels. Masani - a democrat par excellence - feels that this solution may eventually come, and that when it does it will emanate from the people - a force which is often treated with disdain by the politicians because of the widespread illiteracy but which has a fund of intelligence, common sense and honesty which is often lacking in the party political world.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN MALI

by Jacques Lefert

SPR.L. During the last two years important changes have taken place in Africa. Governments and systems of government have been knocked down, and all these coups d'états have had one thing in common : the seizure of power by the army. In Algeria, in Ghana, in the Congo, in the Central African Republic, in Upper Volta and in Nigeria - in each of these countries, soldiers have thrust out of office men of the first post-colonial period, whom they considered to be incompetent.

Since last August, Mali has been going through an equivalent stage of its political development - though with significant differences. As in all the other states mentioned, the political regime in Mali is based on a single party -