

*Article sent to Gulshan
for mail to mine*

REFLECTIONS ON REPUBLIC DAY, 1968

by

Binoo Masani, M. P.

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Republic Day is an occasion for renewing our pledge of loyalty and dedication to the Republic and to the Constitution of this country, which embodies the free way of life. It is an occasion for rededication. It is also an occasion for stock-taking, ~~for looking back~~, and considering how we have been doing, so that we may hope to do better.

A few months ago, when Independence Day was last observed on 15th August, 1967, ^{the} Acharya Vinoba Bhave made a remark which showed how he felt about ^{the} state of affairs. He asked: "Would not Dependence Day have been more appropriate as a name for the occasion?"

Complacency and patting ourselves on the back would not, therefore, be the right thing to do on such an occasion. Nor does the state of affairs justify any such complacency. Today our Republic is in danger. The State that we brought into existence along with its democratic Constitution in 1950 is threatened from many directions. Some of them are external and many are internal.

From abroad, the danger is clear. It comes from the unrelenting hostility towards this country of the Chinese Communist regime which seems determined to destroy our country, along with the other free countries of South and South East Asia. Unfortunately, because of the failure to solve the problem of Kashmir, our neighbours in Pakistan — with whom we should be on friendly terms — have thought it fit to join hands with those who are a threat not only to our freedom but to the freedom of the whole Sub-continent including their own country.

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This external threat is a very dangerous one. On ~~a day~~ like this we should, therefore, express our gratitude to those who are fighting so that the freedom of our own country and of our neighbours may be preserved. I refer to the brave men who are laying down their lives today in Viet Nam, so that the defence of South Viet Nam and the whole of this region from Chinese Communist imperialism may be preserved. Young men from Australia and New Zealand; young men from the United States; men from the Philippines and Korea and Thailand and Viet Nam itself. It is they who are defending our country today by laying down their lives. They are pinning down the enemy and preventing him from launching another attack on our frontiers as he did in 1962. It is a good thing that the war in Viet Nam is at last being won. I have no doubt at all that within a year or two the war will be over.

The more dangerous threats to our freedom and our Republic come from inside our own country. They are numerous. There is the economic one with which we are intimately familiar. We use the word recession these days in our public discussions. I don't mind saying I think it is something much worse than recession. It is a real collapse. We are bankrupt. We face a complete collapse of our economy. The causes are not far to seek.

The first is the wrong policies and Plans of Government. The other basic cause of our economic plight is, let us face it, our inability to work hard. This applies to most of us. It may be due to climate. It may be due to malnutrition over the centuries. It may be due to Karma and a fatalistic view of the world. Whatever the causes, the fact remains that we are not a hard working people.

Many years ago in Germany, after world war II, the German Government found it

necessary to issue a "communique against work fury". They warned managements and workers that the people of Germany were working too hard and that this was bad for the mental and physical health of the community. ~~It~~ It will be agreed there is no danger whatsoever of any Government in this country having to issue any such communique!

The moral condition of our national life is not much better. The operation of what Rajaji calls ⁸ Permit Licence Raj creates numerous opportunities and provocations for corruption. Every control becomes a source of further corruption. Our country has been described as "a smuggler's paradise".

We may turn to another facet of our national life - violence and disorder. Every day when we open our newspapers we find some new variety of perversity. Sometimes it is workers, sometimes it is students, sometimes it is members of Parliament; sometimes it is Ministers of State Governments, who are guilty of lawlessness and disorder. It has been rightly described as the tyranny of the minority. Can there be any doubt that, whenever these mob incidents take place, a small handful of hooligans of a particular kind take the law into their own hands to the horror of the big majority? Unfortunately the majority is passive and does not stand up for itself. Even the police who are supposed to guard us become passive and stand by and watch the lives and property of the people being ~~destroyed~~ ^{new} attacked. In Delhi, on New Year's Eve, some of the most shocking things that have happened in free India took place. Without rhyme or reason, without any provocation at all, women were attacked in the centre of the Capital of India in the most brutal fashion. /shameless and

The Government which could not protect our country in 1962 from the Chinese enemies has now abdicated its responsibility for maintaining order and cannot protect our persons and the exercise of our rights. It is high time that we stopped passing the buck from the Union Government to the State Government and from the State Government back to the Union Government. There can be no question that the primary responsibility of the Government is to protect the life, property and the security of the citizen. This abdication cannot be permitted to last.

Mahatma Gandhi, the great lover of freedom, was also a great disciplinarian. He used to say that discipline and love of freedom are two sides of the same coin. No man can love freedom who cannot maintain discipline within himself. In 1941, when he had to choose one satyagrahi from the whole of India to lead individual satyagraha against the war, he chose Acharya Vinoba Bhave because he said that he was the most self-disciplined man in the whole of India. If this self discipline is not preserved, what normally happens is that countries lose their liberty and the discipline that they cannot evolve democratically is then imposed on them by some dictatorship of one kind or another.

It is natural that in this situation the Communists, who believe in disrupting not only our Republic and our Constitution but all other free countries, should take full advantage of our follies. In Bengal, they have tried to carry out what Mr. Chavan, the Home Minister, has called "an attempt at rebellion." But when Mr. Chavan is asked by some of us to ban the Communist Party, ⁸ he develops cold feet and runs away from the challenge. The result is that these enemies of freedom are allowed to rampage throughout the country and to create disorder in one State or after another. The Communists are deliberately trying to subvert

the country because that is their creed. But what of the rest of us who pledge allegiance to the Republic and who take the oath of loyalty to the Constitution and yet who forget it for the remaining 364 days of the year? Undoubtedly, ~~some~~ the Congress Party has led this country to this rot, because it has been the biggest and the ruling Party. Like the Bourbons, they seem to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. The fight for power as between individuals and factions goes on.

Unfortunately, some of those who have formed governments in the States of different political parties have not done much better. I agree with my friend, Jayaprakash Narayan, who has said that, except for the States of Orissa and Madras, the non-Congress Governments have shown no improvement in the misrule of the Congress Party. This creates a very great threat and a danger to our Republic.

No single political party in India can today save the country. What this means is that we must forget our parties and put the country first. I am sorry to say that even the best of us seem to be unable to do so. In the last few months, one of the Congress leaders for whom I have considerable regard and whom I have known for forty years now said in public that he put loyalty to his party first and that he would be prepared to lay down his life for his party. What a pity he did not make this statement about the country.

In this situation, unless we politicians are able to subordinate party interests to the broader national interests and create a government of all the talents, a Government of Democratic Unity, a national government minus the communists in the coming months, then as night follows the day, our country will be in danger of going the way that Pakistan, Indonesia and Greece have gone in the last few years. Nature abhors a vacuum. Politics, like nature, also abhors a vacuum. Today in this country a power vacuum is developing it. It is reflected in the rioting and incendiaries that is taking place all over the country. If this is not checked, if this is not suppressed with courage by those in authority, then this power vacuum will suck in those who have the power and can use it. The people will turn to them. This is why today Colonels are ruling in Greece and Generals are ruling in Pakistan and Indonesia. Not that the Colonels and Generals wanted power but the people turned to them and they got sucked into the power vacuum. This would be a great pity. I am a consistent democrat and I would like to fight on to the bitter end for preserving democracy. I am a consistent democrat because I agree with Winston Churchill, who was once asked what he thought of democracy. He said: "Democracy is undoubtedly the worst of all known systems of government - except all the others!" That is a profound truth. It is only when we lose our freedom that we realise how precious it was. Today we have that freedom. That freedom is today in peril, and if we do not rise to defend it, nobody else is going to defend it for us.

So far I have criticized the politicians. But who put the politicians there? Who elected them? Whom do they represent? They represent the common people of India. Too many people grumble for five long years because the government is not what they want it to be, but they do very little else. They say: "They are ruining the country. Why don't they put it right. Why don't they solve the food problem, why don't they remove controls. Why don't they set us free?" But who are "they" whom we so virtuously denounce? We are all "they". Nobody has got clean hands. We are all guilty, because we are all part of one another. The common people of India have put in office those who are there and they and

nobody else can remove them. The business community is the most remiss of the lot. One can forgive the illiterate people of India. They don't know very much. But those who have got knowledge and experience, the means and the money and the economic strength, if they in their selfishness let down the country, who is going to save it? How many businessmen, how many industrialists have come forward to identify themselves with the good cause, to try and lend a hand to those who are engaged in the good fight? A very small minority.

Recently in Bombay we lost two of the finest citizens of that kind, two industrialists who had thrown themselves into fighting for freedom, into fighting for protecting the Republic, into fighting for what they believed was right. One was Col. Leslie Sawhney, the other was Mr. Charanjit Rai. How many people have we got like that? Where are the young men to fill up the gap that their deaths has caused? Eternal vigilance, it has been said, is the price of liberty. Every day freedom has to be defended, not once in five years. Every day attacks on freedom have to be repelled. Each one of us has an obligation to participate in this fight. Passivity is the enemy of our freedom. As I said, the responsibility of those who have the means and those who have the knowledge is the highest. But even the commonest people, the smallest people, can do a great deal.

A few weeks ago, five British girl typists in a factory outside London, appalled at the plight of Britain and the devaluation and the bankruptcy that Britain faces along with us now, got together and said: Out of love for our country we shall come to office half an hour earlier and work half an hour extra without asking for overtime. What happened? They became heroines overnight. Prince Philip sent a telegram that this was the best news he had heard for a long time. Prime Minister Harold Wilson of the Labour Party added his congratulations. All three political parties said they were behind this move. The Poet Laureate composed a poem in honour of these five girls. BBC and Television featured these girls who have become household names now. A printing house turned out hundreds of thousands of badges saying "I'm Backing Britain." Seven hundred and forty other employees in that factory said they would follow these five girls, and they all started working half an hour extra without pay. This made it possible for the Company to cut the price of their product by five per cent. This shows that what five young girls could do surely five Indian citizens could do, five Indian girls could do. This is the kind of thing that this country needs today. Not even a change of government so much, not even a new Prime Minister, which this country needs so badly, but a new spirit amongst all of us which will soon create a change in the government or throw it out. What we want is a change amongst ourselves. We have got great assets in this country. We have a fine, sensible, practical peasantry, inferior to none in the world; illiterate, but practical and knowing how to get most out of the soil, if only they are given water, fertilizer and seed. We have got a work force which foreign technicians have said, given them leadership, is as good as any in the world. We have a rising corps of young professional executives whom we find in Management Associations, Junior Chambers of Commerce, Lions Clubs and Rotary Clubs. We have got all these assets.

What we want is that people from amongst these classes should come out and lead; come up, stand up and be counted.