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M. R. Masani
M. R. MASANI, M.P.

✓ DEMOCRATS MUST UNITE

After twenty years of Independence, the outlook in India is gloomy. A great deal of heart-searching is going on as to just what has gone wrong and whither we are drifting.

A good friend of India spoke about this state of affairs when visiting Delhi at the beginning of this year. He was Mr. George Woods, then Vice-President of the World Bank which, next to the United States, has been the biggest donor of aid and sustenance to our country. He said: "We must be frank to say that in many parts of the world the situation is discouraging and even disturbing. Here in our host country (he was speaking in New Delhi), the home of one-seventh of all the human race, after twenty years of independence many billions of people have not to experience more than the feeblest manifestations of progress. Those who believe as I do that India is engaged in a task of deep meaning for all the developing countries must be gravely concerned by the uncertainties that cloud her national life. India is an exceptionally dramatic case because of its size and location on the troubled Asian continent. But it is by no means the only country where hope has dwindled to despondency."

One wishes one could say that Mr. Woods is wrong. But we know in our hearts that he is right. It would take more than an article

to cover all the ground that he has done in the broad sweep of his remarks. Let us here deal with only one reason for the kind of despondency in place of hope that is coming over intelligent people in our country, and that is in regard to the way in which our parties and the political system are developing in our country or as they are failing to develop.

It would not be unfair to say that our politicians have never been so low in public esteem as they are today. Let me quote President Zakir Hussain on the 30th of March as reported in the *Times of India* the following day. He said: "How can we speak to hot-headed student mobs and ask them to refrain from senseless destruction and disturbance of peace when even those in high political and public places set an example of violent expression and agitational approach in the conduct of public affairs? The unseemly scramble for power, growing lawlessness, senseless destruction of life and property are bringing democracy into disrepute." Mr. Jaysprakash Narayan said in April: "In every Party the extremists are trying to pull down the good men." Mr. Frank Anthony, a fine parliamentarian said in April: "Power hungry politicians are seeking to enlarge their empires by interfering with the internal management of the best universities, colleges and schools. The disas-

trous results are already increasingly evident in intrigue, nepotism, indiscipline and a rapid decline in educational standards."

Mr. Frank Moraes, writing in the *Indian Express* in March, said: "The nation-wide deterioration in public conduct began and will probably end with our politicians in Parliament and the State Legislatures. For unless these gentlemen learn to mend their manners and their way of life the people will never be persuaded to observe better codes of individual and general behaviour. The politicians have ceased to amuse. More and more they are coming to be regarded as a public nuisance which needs to be abated. For ironically nobody has brought and is bringing parliamentary institutions more into public disrepute than some of the members who inhabit them..... 'Are these human beings or baboons?' This writer overheard a foreign visitor observe after one exhibition at a certain legislature. If India were to live by politics alone the country would be a madhouse."

I was in Calcutta recently to attend a meeting of the Consultative Committee of Parliament on West Bengal affairs. While there, I became aware of the fact that in Bengal or at least in Calcutta today most people do not seem to want an election. They don't want it in November and they don't even want it in next

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February. The general mood is: "Leave us alone. We don't want elections and we don't want politicians. We are very happy with the Governor and the bureaucracy. Why? Because they are honest and they have minimum government. They leave us alone. They don't interfere in our lives." The bureaucrats naturally do the least that they have to do, holding the fort between one government and another. Now this has gone down extremely well. Everyone says: "Why can't we enjoy Governor's Rule for two or three years? Why can't you leave us alone?" Later in Lucknow I came across the same mood. People do not want elections. In other words, they do not want democracy. They are prepared to forego their wonderful right to vote, to choose their own government. Supposing in five years' time the whole of India were to feel this way? Where would be our Constitution and our way of life?

I do not blame this impatience with politicians. I think it is very understandable. The factors that make for the low repute of our politicians and parties today can be broken down into three or four. One is the lop-sided situation at the Centre where a minority party has been holding office for twenty years. The Congress Party has never secured 50 per cent of the popular vote of the Indian people in any election. The highest it got was 48 per cent. They have come down now to 38 per cent. In the absence of proportional representation, we have had a very distorted political structure, with a minority of people ruling the majority. As many as 308 out of the 520 members of the present Lok Sabha were elected by a minority of their own constituents - a very high proportion. The majority of members of the Lok Sabha do not represent a majority of their own constituents. They came in on a split vote because there were too many candidates. This comes of the failure of the Indian people to evolve a two or three party system.

Perhaps the root of the tragedy may be traced to the failure to follow Mahatma Gandhi's advice

to the Indian National Congress to dissolve itself as a political party and to allow two parties to come up which would carry on the parliamentary system. A few days before he was assassinated on 30th January, 1948, Gandhi had drafted a resolution for the A.I.C.C. which was about to meet. It said: "The A.I.C.C. resolves to disband the existing Congress organisation and flower into a Lok Sevak Sangh," that is, to cease to be a political party and become a social service, constructive organisation. Perhaps if this advice had been followed, which was so easily forgotten by his lieutenants after his death, we would not be in the plight we are today.

Why did this happen? Why was Gandhi's advice not followed? Because essentially it would have meant that half the politicians would have been out of office at any given time. Let us consider what parliamentary or presidential democracy means. It means that about 40 per cent of a country's politicians are at any given time out of office. In India the trouble is that 80 per cent of the politicians want to be in office all the time! If you get a political caste like that, you cannot have democracy of any kind. The idea of being in the Opposition, of being in the wilderness, is considered to be anathema.

To this imbalance has been added the instability of our governments. In the last sixteen months since February 1967, 13 State Governments have fallen thanks to what are called "defections."

Today, we see that all political parties in India are disintegrating visibly before our eyes. As far as I know there are no exceptions. The Congress Party makes out that the situation is improving for them. They are regaining lost ground. They quote the results of the Haryana election on their side. If the Congress Party gets a majority in West Bengal during the next elections, the last thing the people will think is that the Congress people are good and they want them to be in office. The only reason they will win is to keep the

Communists out, because they have tasted Communist rule and they don't want another dose. The same considerations apply all over India. People now vote not for people but against people. They are voting against parties, not for parties. The general pattern is: who shall we vote for to keep out such and such a person or such and such a party? So this reversal in the tide only means that, just as last year people in India were sick of the Congress Party and they voted for Opposition parties, now they are developing the same disgust for Opposition parties and for the moment they are voting for the Congress Party.

If the Congress Party is disintegrating visibly, the Jan Sangh is not in much better shape. The P.S.P. and S.S.P. are already broken reeds. The B.K.D. started breaking up almost the day after it was formed with the defection of Mr. Humayun Kabir, the man who drafted its programme. But I would like to congratulate it on one act for which it was recently responsible, and that was the dissolution of their Bengal Unit because it would not give up its alliance with the Communists. Mr. Ajoy Mukherjee and his group were put outside the B.K.D. because they have clung to the Communist alliance. For that the B.K.D. deserves to be complimented, particularly because of the contrast with my own Party.

My own Party has been developing in the last few years, but more openly in the last twelve months, a certain measure of indiscipline and lax behaviour which is doing its own image no good. Recently this subterranean process came to the surface when the Gujarat unit indulged in a shameless breach of faith. The failure of the national leadership to take proper steps to restore the credibility of the Party which was shattered has added to the blot on the good name of the Party. Credibility is the equivalent of credit in business. When a businessman blots his copybook and behaves in such a way that nobody gives him credit and everyone says "cash down", the odds are that such a businessman is pushed out of business because

in business you function on your credit. A political party which loses its credibility is in the same situation as a business without credit. Mr. Bhailalbhai Patel, the leader of the Gujarat Party, in a candid moment said in Gujarati (this was reported in the Gujarati press): "Now nobody will believe the word of the Swatantra Party. Only a fool would do so." How can a Party whose leader has made this statement face the electorate in 1972 if the people who created this lack of credibility are still leading the Party? The sad thing is that very venerable veterans in my Party have refused to understand this very simple proposition and prefer to pretend that nothing has happened.

It is against this kind of thing that I have found it necessary to take the unpleasant step of refusing to participate in the administration of the Swatantra Party until I find evidence of a change of heart, a belief in ethical and disciplined methods. Whether this will come or not is not for me to say. One can only do what is the right thing and leave it to others to make the right response. Many years ago in Ahmedabad, addressing the Harold Laski Institute in 1962, I remember quoting a remark of Prof. Towney who told Mr. Ramsay Macdonald: "Your Party has the right to demand any service of you but not to dishonour you."

I could quote many editorials supporting the line that I have taken. But what interested or amused me most was an article in the *Free Press Journal* in our own city which approached this matter with a delightful sense of humour. In that article written by Mr. K. Srinivasan on June 7 he wrote: "The Madras decision of the National Executive of the Swatantra Party should make it plain to Mr. Masani how much he is out of date and out of tune with the Party." I agree I am somewhat old fashioned about certain matters! He said: "Mr. Masani has explained that the Party should endeavour to build itself on rational scientific lines, based on ethics, discipline and good faith. He can now see how limited

reason, science, ethics and discipline and good faith, are in dealing with politics. Reason belongs to the eighteenth century; science is of the nineteenth century. In the latter part of the 20th Century politics need not be burdened with antiquated limitations of this kind. Politics is now one of ganging up, of tactics and expediency; of vested interest and unscrupulous adventurism; of grab and drive; bundhs and gharaos; loot and shoot on all sides."

All this seems to come out of political backwardness, a weakness of democratic roots, the absence of the non-conformist conscience, the absence of a revulsion against anti-social behaviour. In other countries, people don't do certain things because they know they will be sent to Coventry, nobody will talk to them, nobody will shake hands with them. But these defectors and these people who break promises here now feel that they can get away with it. They don't feel that they will be ostracised and told "now you are not fit to associate with." If one party is betrayed, another party welcomes them.

There are two kinds of discipline—the democratic discipline that we exercise on ourselves—and the totalitarian discipline that is exercised on us by a dictator - a Stalin or a Hitler. History shows us that when people are not able to exercise democratic discipline over themselves, when indiscipline becomes a mass phenomenon as it is becoming in our India today, then nature in its own Malthusian way creates a dictatorship that imposes discipline on such people.

Gandhiji was a great political philosopher in his own way. He often said that Freedom and Discipline are two sides of the same coin. An undisciplined man cannot be free. And a free man has to have internal discipline. He referred to this in 1941 when he started Individual Satyagraha against the War. He said: "I was going to look round India and choose the most disciplined man in India to be the first satyagrahi." He chose Acharya Vinobha Bhave as the first individual satyagrahi

for he said he was the most disciplined man, and only the most disciplined man can fight for freedom.

On top of all this there are the economic policies that have aggravated this demoralisation—permit licence raj, socialism, planning, whatever you like to call it, which has created a concentration of economic and political power. This concentration of economic and political power makes for corruption and demoralisation in our public life, because the odds or the stakes are very high. People don't get elected to Parliament or the Assembly any more because they like making speeches, as I do, or expressing themselves freely, as I do. Many of them now get elected because that is the way to make money, because of the permit licence raj. Every minister therefore every member of Parliament has to a certain extent a political pull in influencing the issue of licences.

What is to be done about all this? There have been suggestions of a law being passed against defections, mostly by people who do not deal with defectors. You can't pass a law to make people good. When a man commits a crime, you can put him in jail. When a man defects you can put him out of business, as you think, for a year or so. Some people say he must not be allowed to be a minister for six months. Others say six months is too little. Let him not be made a minister for one year. But this is not the answer. If a man wants to defect, it is not always a ministership that is at stake after. He can be compensated in other ways, with other jobs or with cash. How are you going to stop blackmarket money being paid to a defector? There is no law that can stop it. In other words, you can't make people good by legislation. There has to be the pressure of public opinion in the sense that you lose special esteem which, as I said, no longer helps because shameless people are allowed to carry on. When Mr. K. D. Malaviya was appointed Chairman of the Heavy Engineering Corporation, the Prime Minister struck a very big

blow at the integrity of our public life. When my Party refused to expel those who justify breach of faith, it struck a big blow at the purity of public life.

Mr. J. R. D. Tata came forward a few weeks ago with a serious contribution to the discussions. He said that in our present situation the Presidential type of government would do better than the Parliamentary. I am very glad he made this intervention. I wish people like him would intervene more actively in politics and bring some reason and sense into it, but I cannot say his suggestion provides a solution of our problem. Just changing the form of our Constitution is not going to solve the problem. The Latin American countries which are, like us, backward also have the Presidential form of government. But they do not work it like the United States. So, if the people are backward, if character is lacking, if democratic roots are lacking, then doctoring the Constitution or system of Government is in itself not a full answer. It may be that the Presidential system may work a little better than the Parliamentary but the problem is much more fundamental. The problem goes beyond constitutional amendments to national character and the character of the natural leadership. It lies in the character of the people and the politicians they throw up.

Now, it may be that India deserves better leadership than she has got in the last twenty years. I think our common people, our white people, did not deserve what they have got in the last twenty years. On the other hand, there is an old saying that every country gets the government it deserves. After all, who elected these people to office? Who kept Jawaharlal Nehru for twenty years in power? Are not all of us also guilty along with the politicians? When we say 'they' have done this, 'they' won't do that, 'they' are like this, who are these 'they'? Who put them there? We did. They were not nominated by an outsider. Too many people grumble for five years and do very little else. They deserve what they get. Because democracy is

not the casting of a vote every five years. That is a very poor idea of a democracy. Democracy consists in day to day vigilance and day to day participation in the functions of citizenship. Therefore I would like to suggest that we are 'they'. Everyone of us is also 'they'. It is no good saying we are good, but they, the politicians, are bad. That is too easy. That will not solve our problems. We will have to do what Gandhiji used to ask people to do: "Turn the searchlight inwards."

So far it seems to me that we have too much of politics and too little of citizenship in India today. The politicians are active, but the citizen is passive. That is why the politician is bad. The politician can afford to be bad because we are passive. In America, this check on the politician is called grass roots democracy. It is a very important part of democracy. It is not in the Constitution, but the American Constitution could not have worked as it has worked if it wasn't for grass roots democracy, the voluntary action of the citizens, people coming together, small people to clean up some mess; to throw out crooks from the municipality; to capture City Hall and clean it up; to clean up their own political party when it is full of corruption.

Jayaprakash recently wrote a letter to the Prime Minister telling her why he did not go all the way to Srinagar to attend a meeting of the National Integration Council. He said that Party politics itself is a factor responsible for the growth of the force of disintegration. And he went on to say: "The present composition of the Council which is made up mostly of Ministers and Parliamentarians is likely to give the impression that the task of National Integration is one that is largely, if not wholly, to be accomplished by the State. This, as you know, is far from being the case. Indeed, more has to be done at the people's level in this regard than by the State." This is an illustration that Jayaprakash gives that much more needs to be done at the voluntary grass roots level, much less by the Government and by Parliament.

For this passivity all classes are responsible. But the responsibility or the guilt of the educated and the propertied classes is the highest, because, having the knowledge, having the resources, they have failed the country, which a poor illiterate peasant may be forgiven for having done. There is an old slogan coming from Britain that we must educate our masters. The politician must educate the electorate; it is a very good thought. But the problem we face is: who is to educate the politicians? Today the politician is morally illiterate, he lacks not the capacity to read or write or the gift of the gab but he lacks the character part of leadership. He lacks the sense of responsibility, the sense of integrity, the sense of dependability. And this ranges all the way from being late at public meetings, agreeing to speak and not turning up and forgetting even to send a telegram by way of apology, up to cheating. So who is to train the leaders in honesty and good behaviour and a sense of responsibility?

The world of management has in the last ten years gone in for a great deal of management development and training. Every good business house now takes pride in sending its officers to the Administrative Staff College at Hyderabad or the Institute of Management in Ahmedabad or Calcutta, and indeed many of them run their own training institutions. There is an excellent Tata Training Centre in Poona where a non-stop programme of training of management goes on from January to December. Nothing like this has been done so far to train our public men and women.

Recently, some of us are trying out this experiment. Last year, my good friend, Leslie Savhny, and I were discussing this very problem of the need for this kind of training. But as we were discussing and planning this, he died. It was a great loss to everyone with whom he was concerned. He had a great love of young people. He had a great love of freedom and he had a fine instinct for leadership. So, after his death, some of

us got together and established what is known as the Leslie Sawhny Programme of Training for Democracy. We have already run several camps—in Orissa, at Lonavla, in Bombay, in Kerala and in Coimbatore. We are going round the country. Wherever there are 30 or 40 men and women, never mind what their politics are, except for the communists, we are prepared to train everyone. The Fascists and the Communists do go in for indoctrination, but Liberal democrats have nothing. Neither the Swatantra Party, nor the Congress Party, nor the PSP have any means of creating dedicated, convinced, disciplined workers. The Leslie Sawhny Programme makes it possible for them, for youth leagues, for student groups, for women's councils, for social workers, for trade unions, to train their members into becoming good citizens.

If the efforts to change the picture of our politics do not succeed, I am afraid within a very few years we shall be in danger of coming to the end of our parliamentary democracy. Nature abhors a vacuum. So do politics. If a political vacuum develops in this country, a vacuum of public confidence, a vacuum of power, where power abdicates, law and order abdicate, disorder comes over the country as it has come over Bengal and other parts of the country in the last few months, then people will not hesitate to give up their democracy. Then what people feel in Lucknow and Calcutta, they will feel throughout the country. They will turn round and look for a saviour, De Gaulle, or a man on horseback, to save them from politicians. We shall go the way of Pakistan, Indonesia and Greece.

India today is suffering from a failure of leadership in all her political parties. I shall end, as I started, with Mr. George Woods. In the later part of his speech which I quoted from earlier, he said: "One of the serious liabilities of some poorer countries in short is leadership that does not lead. And one of the results is likely to be public apathy and cynicism instead of the ferment of enthu-

siasm and the hard work needed for economic progress." And this I can testify to, that the leaders of most of the political parties are "tailists". They are not leaders. Lenin was a great political strategist. He said two very clear things. One was that "Cadres decide everything". His other thought was that leadership was in contrast to what he called "tailism". He accused political leaders of his time of catching the tail of the donkey, and following the party instead of being at the head. Now this is true. Most of the leaders of most political parties are tailists. They lack the courage to lead. They first find out what the majority of the party wants and then say it, just as a political party tries to find out what a majority of the people want and then says it. How many Congressmen have I heard saying: "We don't like socialism. But, you know, the Indian people want it, so we have got to pretend to be socialists." Jawaharlal Nehru sold them that Big Lie and they believed it.

Now, if the leaders are bad, are the people bad too? I would not like to think so. I think we have many fine qualities among our people. We have a peasantry endowed with robust common-sense, simple faith, sturdy dignity. We have a labour force which, if given proper training and leadership, is as good as any in the world, with simple needs and low standards of living. We have a small but growing band of middle class professional executives who, in knowledge and capability, are second to none in the world. We have a new generation of post-war, post-independence young men capable, willing, modern, uninhibited. How are they going to save this country?

I am afraid at this stage it would be too late to say that one political party can save the country. I had that dream in 1959, that by forming the Swatantra Party we could revolutionise the face of Indian politics. I used to call it "the last hope of Indian democracy." Unfortunately, in spite of our beautiful principles, our behaviour has now made the

people of India feel that the Swatantra Party cannot by itself remove the Congress and take its place. In other words the lack of credibility has destroyed this dream. I don't think any other political party by itself can hope to take the place of the Government that must go if India is to be saved. There is a need for all those who are democrats, for all those who are opposed to Communism on the one hand and Communism on the other, to come together in one grouping or front to save the country. I do not care what it is called. Call it the National Democratic Party or Front or whatever you like. I agree with Mr. Charan Singh that "love of the Party image, the Party symbol" seems to come in the way.

I for one welcome the initiative taken by Mr. Charan Singh and the B.K.D. to call for a fusion of their own Party, the Swatantra Party and the P.S.P. to start with. I would like to think that in the ranks of the Swatantra Party membership also this proposal, if carried to them, would evoke a widespread and positive response. After all, Rajaji and I with Prof. Ranga's cooperation, offered to merge with the Jan Sangh at the end of 1965. We offered to give up our name, our flag and our symbol and have a new one if the Jan Sangh was prepared to merge along with us into one Party. If that was legitimate why should it not now be legitimate to have a new name, a new flag and a new symbol with people who are closer to us than the Jan Sangh ever were? Unfortunately, that effort was turned down by the Jan Sangh. But we had made it. And I think we should stand by this broadminded stand that we are prepared to join and sink ourselves, our identity, to sacrifice our party, if necessary, for the sake of the country. That is why I say that the country must come first and not the Party. If these forces can come together, I am quite clear that the face of Indian politics would change, because what is creating despondency is a sense of helplessness, a sense that there is no alternative to the Con-

gress Party. This is what most people are today fed up about—that there is nothing that can take the place of the Congress Government at the Centre. The moment two or three parties come together in Parliament and outside, there will be a sizable *bloc* that will be recognisable by the people as being broadbased enough to challenge the Congress Party in 1972. If this is not done, I fear we are in danger of throwing the baby of parliamentary democracy out with the bathwater of the Congress Government in Delhi. Because, at some stage, people

will get so fed up, as they were with the Muslim League politicians in Pakistan, as they were with the politicians of Greece, and say: "Let us have a military dictatorship and let us get rid of these people."

I would not like that to happen because I believe in democracy. I believe that democracy is worth fighting for. It has its imperfections. There is one good thing about it which no other system has, unless you have hereditary monarchy. And that is that Democracy permits of a peaceful and constitutional change of Govern-

ment when the people want it. No other system has that. Once you put in a military dictatorship, the only way to throw it out is by another *coup d'etat*, by force.

The last word on the subject, is something that was said by a very great democrat—Winston Churchill. He, if anyone, knew all the good and the bad things about democracy. When he was asked what he had to say about democracy, Winston Churchill made a very wise, profound remark. He said: "Of all systems of Government, democracy is undoubtedly the worst—except all the others!"

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