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What stirred us?

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by Rajmohan Gandhi



MR DANGE, the Communist leader, has declared that Communists are the true followers of Mahatma Gandhi.

In making this statement Mr Dange comes out as a follower of Moscow. A Soviet writer said some days before Mr Dange that Gandhi drew inspiration from Lenin.

This is about as accurate as stating that Lenin owed his inspiration to the Buddha, or to St. Paul. There is, however, no point in getting indignant about these cynical untruths. These have always marked the period just before dictatorship, of the right or the left, takes over a land. The plan to seize control of this country should concern us more than the distortions that are flung.

Hardly Gandhian

Can anyone honestly claim that Communism has been a success anywhere in the world? The suppression of Czechoslovakia is hardly a Gandhian move, or a step in accordance with the teachings of Gautama or Christ. If Mr Dange or the men in the Kremlin insist that it is an action in the spirit of Lenin (or Stalin?), their better knowledge of Red theology should be conceded.

The unseemly quarrel in Kerala between Mr Dange's followers and those of Mr Gopalan and Mr Namboodiripad is not a bright advertisement for Communism either. "Nefarious toppling game" is the latest description Mr Gopalan has given to the activities of the CPI in Kerala.

As for the Naxalites, they are split into no less than seven groups. The Naxalite theoretician, Mr Charu Mazumdar, calls the leaders of one of these groups "the running dogs of imperialism".

If we truly care for the Indian people we shall have to give them something better than Communism. And we shall have to give them something totally different from the depressing mixture they are now living with. We can, too.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan has made a deep impact on our people. Men from other lands have noticed this. The Times of London,

seldom eager to invite charges of exaggeration, carries the headline "India stirred by Pathan's fast". It says, "Indians are now commonly sceptical about these overplayed gestures (fasts), but the Khan, who is graced with Gandhi's humility and sincerity, has become the most respected leader in the country in two days."

"His decision," it goes on, "has electrified millions of Indians and perhaps embarrassed Delhi's hard-boiled politicians... In fact, the decision to invite the Khan to India from Afghanistan has backfired on Indian leaders, who are now seeing themselves depicted unfavourably in cartoons."

Badshah Khan has touched something in Indian hearts. He has spoken the truth to our leaders as well as to our people. It has been plain to everyone that his words have come out of sympathy and affection, not bitterness.

The letters and telegrams that ordinary Indians have sent Badshah Khan show what a ready soil there is in India for his sort of views, even if they hurt. Press comments reveal the same thing. The country is tired of hypocrisy, but it wants relief from cynicism as well. It is hungry for decency.

No one has felt in Badshah Khan a desire to make himself popular or to gather power. He has not chosen segments of Indian society for condemnation. He has not tried to inflame class war or communal war. In short, he has had no axe to grind.

Attract masses

If we are tempted to tell our political leaders that they have a lot to learn from this, let us tarry and realise that all of us have. Self-seeking is not a monopoly of our politicians.

Mrs Gandhi has put up an important challenge to industrialists and businessmen. Speaking to some of them in Madras she said, "If industry and trade accepted the principle of social responsibility, exercised financial discipline and introduced better management practices leading to efficiency, as in advanced countries,

the Government would only be too glad to shed controls."

Are our industrialists ready to accept this challenge? Will some of them live and act as if their property was a trust, meant to be used solely for the creation of a better society? If they did they could demand reciprocal action from the Government. They would, in addition, attract large masses of Indians away from Communism.

Mrs Gandhi also said recently that in this climate of violence all Indians must search their hearts. She added, in fact, that it was atonement that was needed.

Will Mrs Gandhi take these verities to their logical conclusion? Will she stump the country with the message that honesty is more important than being progressive, that socialism by itself cannot cure careerism or corruption?

First things first

Very few now doubt that her gifts are truly remarkable. Some of these gifts she chose not to reveal until quite recently. Are her skills not worthy of a cause more significant than the ones to which she is devoting them at the moment? If first things are to be dealt with first, she should lead a nation-wide battle to restore character. She will get a response even greater than Badshah Khan has received if she does.

Character is of greater worth than wealth or its redistribution. It is also more important, really, than political freedom. Unless we get this straight we shall not cure the rot in the country's life. Because political freedom was made priority number one, millions of Indians felt that the exit of the British would be followed by the entry of peace and prosperity. They were grievously mistaken.

All this is a blow to our national pride. But it is good occasionally if our pride is demolished. And there are moments when we actually welcome the sound of the fall of our ego. The response to Badshah Khan's outspoken words showed that.