

New image

Continued from Page 5, Column 6

promise their self-respect and courage of conviction. It is possible that a plethora of controls and regulations and State interference in almost every activity could have contributed to this process of decline but has not the time come for the business community to re-integrate itself and shed some of the less desirable complexes to which I have adverted above?

In my opinion, clear thinking is called for on the economic issues affecting the country today. Reacting adversely everytime to any action taken by the Government is hardly an effective or judicious mode of expression. It would be more desirable for the business community to study the economic policies of the different political parties, particularly the Congress, and to make an objective analysis of its programmes. What I mean by objective analysis is that any programme should be examined from the point of view of the 550 million people of this country, most of whom belong to the lower economic strata and are spread over in villages and in smaller towns, and not only from the point of view of the wealthy few who try to dominate the working of the Chambers of Commerce and such organisations. Looked at in the national perspective, if the policies of the Government or a party are in the larger interests of the nation, they should be openly supported. If, on the other hand, they are likely to be detrimental to the larger interests, alternative suggestions and modifications should be thought of, put forward and pressed for adoption. Whichever policies are found to be for the greater good of the greater number, howsoever unpalatable to a wealthy few, should elicit support from the business community which should have the courage of conviction to accept it. From the long-term view of the country's economy, if some concrete proposals are made for a better solution of problems like, unemployment, improper utilisation of the country's scarce resources and such others the industrialists and business men should set an example by positive action in the right direction.

If the business community rises to the occasion, as it did before independence many a time, and stations itself in the vanguard to help fulfil the aspirations of the people, the image will take care of itself.

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2327

Business initiative

The nation's preoccupation with the high-level political crisis has tended to minimise the significance of the psychological turmoil in the business world. The present ferment and the temper of the Government have caught trade and industry generally napping. Consequently, even such a drastic measure as bank nationalisation finds business men intellectually and psychologically unprepared. No doubt, some individuals reacted swiftly and spontaneously, but business institutions and organisations representing trade and industry were slow and equivocal, if not non-committal, for reasons best known to themselves. The reaction to the nationalisation of banks was indeed generally muted. We publish today, elsewhere on this page, a letter by the Secretary-General of the FICCI explaining the stand taken by the Federation on the various controversial issues of the day, a stand which has come in for some criticism. Most people will still feel that something vital is missing. Are these institutions afraid to speak up for fear of "offending" or "annoying" New Delhi? Or are they also anxious to fall in line? Questions such as these were posed by business men themselves at the recent deliberations of the FICCI committee in a small way and, more directly in the meeting of leading industrialists in Delhi and elsewhere. This is a belated but welcome attempt to review the recent developments and to formulate new attitudes. The truth is that even New Delhi seems rather confused about its approach to business.

In point of fact, if business men are now on trial, so is the Government. Both industrialists and the Government are indeed on trial before the country. Both emerge fairly well though, with lingering suspicions all round. The Government is presumably seeking a new path for the transformation of the economy, though even now the follow-up is tardy. The Prime Minister is trying to make out a case for a new image of the Congress and India; business men, on their part, are seeking light. Suspicions mar rapprochement. Both sides also have kept alive the bogey of "ideology" of public and private sectors. In the past, there was a close understanding between business and the Congress mainly be-

cause Indian business contributed handsomely to the national movement, and some of the national leaders even went to the extent of making Indian business a platform for attacking economic colonialism. But as the leaders came face to face with the realities of poverty and the massive problems of development, the distance started creeping in between the Government and the business world. Business grew and so did incomes. But all that was enough. Even Government's own effort was inadequate. Even as things were there was a feeling, rightly or wrongly, that artificial shortages were created, and that there was profiteering and black-marketing, all of which militated against the national spirit. Some skeletons in the cupboard also fell out and were badly exposed; or there was always a fear that more might fall. But the parting of ways mainly came also because business leaders drifted away from the mainstream of national politics, from the intellectual debate, from the thinking areas. Perhaps this was because of the preoccupation with the immense opportunities thrown open by planning and the problems of growing business. This in retrospect seems to many a mistake.

Enlightened industrialists apparently feel that it is the duty of business leaders to look at the Congress party's programme and evaluate it in terms of practical possibilities. This is perhaps a move in the right direction if it also means a constructive response to the new challenge. One rash of misdeeds should not tarnish the whole business world. Business men indeed have a big role to play in beating the evil of poverty. Nobody can consider a business operation as a philanthropic activity. But as in other countries here too there is an expectation that business has also a larger role to play in the normal life and in tackling social and other problems. An operation like this cuts across political lines and gives the business an initiative to make its own major contribution to the solution of national problems. Constructive activity is more laudable than contributions to political funds. If these ideas of some business men gain momentum, we may yet see a healthy rational effort at development.