

FORUM-SERVICE

4124
BACKGROUND FEATURES
INFORMATION and ANALYSIS

Cables: FORMSERV LONDON

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: MELVIN J. LASKY

SUMMIT HOUSE, 1-2 LANGHAM PLACE, LONDON, W.1

Tel.: LANGHAM 6807

FS/177

IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

Week of December 19, 1959

ASIA'S FUTURE

An Interview with Jayaprakash Narayan



(Note:- Forum is privileged to present this exclusive interview with Jayaprakash Narayan, the outstanding Indian leader who has become a figure of world-wide prominence. One of the founders of the Indian Socialist Party and a leading figure in the Indian struggle for independence, a few years ago Mr. Narayan left active politics and joined Vinoba Bhave to take part in his Bhoodan (Land Gift) movement. His personal example and original mind have brought him to be regarded as a sage, and there are observers in and out of India who speak of him as a possible future Prime Minister of his country, though he now lives in ascetic seclusion from politics. In this interview he discusses imperialism in Asia, the Sino-Indian border dispute, and above all, his highly interesting plan for establishing in India a confederation of self-governing communities - linked in an organic hierarchy. The interviewer is Pierre Schneider, who edits WAY magazine. -Ed.)

Question: Do you believe that imperialism today represents a threat to national independence in Asia?

J. Narayan: I think that the old Western imperialism is no longer a threat to the national independence of Asian countries. True, the struggle still goes on in some of these countries, which have yet to achieve their independence from this old imperialism - in West Asia, for

instance. I think that the real threat to the newly independent countries of Asia comes from the new imperialism which is being aggressively represented today by China. But while I realise the seriousness of this threat, I am hopeful that these countries will be able to withstand it. The fact that this new imperialism works in league with its native supporters, by which I mean the communist parties, enhances the seriousness of the threat. But I do feel that countries which have tasted political slavery and have but recently freed themselves from it would be vital and vigorous enough to resist both the internal and the external dangers of which I have just spoken.

Question: Are there comparably important sources of friction in your area today?

J. Narayan: Presently, there is this northern border of ours, where a conflict has already arisen. There has been, since the independence of India, a source of friction resulting from the country's partition. But I think that India and Pakistan are on friendlier terms today than they have ever been before, and I hope that the bonds of friendship will grow stronger. I can see no other sources of friction in India as a region.

Question: Do you believe that the use of authoritarian methods, temporarily or permanently, is unavoidable on account of the arduous efforts towards quick economic development and an improved standard of living?

J. Narayan: No. I do not think that such methods are inevitable, provided the people are patient and the course of development is adapted to the objective conditions. I am afraid that there is a tendency in the developing countries of Asia and Africa to import ready-made institutions and techniques from the highly developed West. This I feel might lead to disaster, which might bring in its wake one kind or another of dictatorship. I would therefore wish that the leaders of the developing countries should aim at an organic process of development rooted in local tradition and conditions, and be invigorated by borrowing from the West. I should also like to stress that too quick a pace of development might prove to be a danger to democracy and might even prove to be a complete failure.

Question: Do you believe that the growing pressure exerted by the steady increase in population constitutes an obstacle to the establishment or the maintenance of democratic liberties?

J. Narayan: The rate of growth of population complicates the question of economic development and only in that indirect way might it affect the question of democracy. I had this factor in mind when I spoke above of local conditions.

Question: According to you, what has been, after the Bandoeng Conference, the influence of the Bandoeng principles on the political evolution of Asia?

J. Narayan: I must admit that I have not given thought to this question. But I should say that Bandoeng meant no more than the expression of the will of the new states of Asia and Africa to live in friendship. But I do not think that, beyond that, Bandoeng has had any practical influence on the international development in these vast continents. And latterly, the behaviour of China in Tibet and on India's frontiers has delivered a shattering blow to the Bandoeng spirit.

Question: It is, if I am not mistaken, your opinion that straight Western democracy is inapplicable to such countries as India. It is with this in mind that you have elaborated a plan for India whereby it would become a confederation of self-governing communities linked in an organic hierarchy. In what way would this scheme answer the special requirements of your country?

J. Narayan: It is not adequately realised that the Western forms of democracy took a long time to develop and mature, and that they had a particular kind of

social, economic and historical background. The setting in Asia and Africa is entirely different, but the attempt is being made to transplant a full-grown tree - let us say - on a completely different kind of soil. It seems reasonable to expect that, under these conditions, that the tree would wither away. That indeed is actually happening, because from Cairo to Djakarta we have seen democratic institutions falling one after another. India perhaps presents the only exception today, but I think it would be agreed that even there, parliamentary democracy exists more in form than in substance. In Africa we find political leaders vehemently advocating the one man-one vote principle, but it appears that as soon as they come to power, they begin to exhibit very marked tendencies towards authoritarianism. I have, therefore, been advocating the adoption of indigenous forms of democracy, based on the self-government of small communities integrated together in a national political structure through indirect elections. I am also advocating the need of developing the politics of co-operation as against the politics of competition at all levels, local, national, and international. The struggle for power between political parties which grow up like mushrooms and have no roots in the people or in social policy but are merely power factions, is making it impossible for a common united effort to be made for national reconstruction. The highly developed countries can possibly afford the luxury of the political warfare between parties (though the party-system does not seem to have worked so well in all Western countries - in France or in Italy for instance). On the other hand, they cannot but lead to frustration and stalemate in the developing countries.

Question: Does this analysis apply only to political and social institutions, or do you consider it relevant also to the economic situation?

J. Narayan: In the economic sphere too, large scale industrialization would not mean an economic development in terms of the rising standard of living of the masses. This would be particularly true in the case of highly populated countries with rapid rates of population growth, such as India or China. Economic development, however, is often considered in terms of militarism and power. It should be understood that in that case the masses will have to be kept quiet by force. This obviously means that economic development of such a kind would require an authoritarian régime. The kind of development I have in mind and that the people everywhere should desire would require a decentralized technology consuming more labour and less capital. This kind of economic pattern would fit into the political pattern that I am advocating. With this proviso: that one might require some basic, centralized industry to provide the base for the dispersed small industries.

Question: Do you believe that this pattern is compatible with the exigencies of efficiency?

J. Narayan: Efficiency is an important thing to keep in mind, but there are other human values that are more important. One fault of Western economic development (and this applies equally to the capitalist and the communist system) has been that it has been enslaved to this one goal.

Question: What will be the role of youth in a system such as the one envisaged by you?

J. Narayan: Educated youth in the developing countries has a great responsibility, and that is to act as missionary at the cost of personal sacrifice in order to create a new society. It is difficult for me to say which ideal of development would appeal particularly to youth. Those who are attracted by power and by inflated values of modernization and bigness might be attracted by the centralised pattern of development - even by authoritarianism. But those who are more concerned with human values and with the quality of life would perhaps be inspired by the ideals that I have been trying to express. It is all a question of how this choice is presented to the youth. I have no doubt that the youth of India would follow Gandhi and Vinoba much more readily than imitate mechanically Western institutions (and this, of course, includes Russian), if they understood fully the implications of both.

Please send us two press cuttings of this article

Bihar Jan Congress Joins Swatantra

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

PATNA, Dec. 30.—The Bihar State Jan Congress, an organization of Congress deserters, which, according to its leader, Mr Ram Binod Singh, has at present six MLAs and about 50,000 members on its rolls, today dissolved itself and merged with the Swatantra Party. The merger decision was taken at a meeting held this morning.

The Jan Congress was formed on the eve of the second general elections in 1957.

After the announcement, the working committee of the State Swatantra Party met this after-

noon. Mr M. R. Masani, general secretary of the Swatantra Party, was present.

The working committee welcomed the merger decision of the Jan Congress and co-opted two of its legislators as its vice-president and general secretary. It also co-opted three others, including two MLAs as members.

Hailing the decision, Mr Masani told newsmen today that "it is a step towards consolidation of our forces to fill the political vacuum. My visit to this State has been rewarded."

If this process continued, he added, it might be possible to reflect the will of the people in the

next general elections, and there would be new and better Governments.

Mr Masani announced that the next national convention of the party would be held at Patna on March 19 and 20.

Commenting on Mr J. P. Narayan's thesis "Reconstruction of Indian policy," he said that the Swatantra Party is the last hope of the people of this country to preserve parliamentary democracy. If it fails, the people may have to come round to Mr Narayan's ideas but up till now I have not lost faith in the success of parliamentary democracy."

Hindustan Times

Dec 31, 1959