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That's the way it is... A.G. NOORANI

What Is The Election For?

Elections are meant to offer the people a choice not only in personalities but in policies. That is what elections are for. Of course, one must make allowances for the usual electioneering gimmicks.

But the whole process loses meaning and purpose if its aim be not to offer policy alternatives and that necessarily implies, as a corollary, that the party offering the choice means to run a government and carry out the policies.

It is from this aspect that one must consider the manifesto of the Ruling Congress as well as the deliberations of the co-ordination committee of the four-party alliance. "As a result of certain recent judicial pronouncements, it has become impossible to effectively implement some of the directive principles of our Constitution," the Cong-I manifesto proclaims.

ABSOLUTELY WRONG

It is an utterly wrong statement. Which specific directive did the Ruling Congress try to implement and fail?

Abolition of privy purses is not a directive principle of our Constitution. On the contrary, the directive as laid down in Article 362 is that "due regard shall be had to the guarantee or assurance given under any such covenant or agreement" with the princes.

The law nationalising the fourteen leading banks was struck down by the Supreme Court but was passed again in a modified form and carried out.

Is it the Court's interpretation of the Fundamental Right to property which Cong-I wishes to set at naught? Or, is it Golak Nath's case?

VAGUE MANIFESTO

Whatever its policy it must be spelt out right now in the manifesto and the people's endorsement sought. The blanket plank in the manifesto will give no mandate. But this is characteristic of the style of Mrs Gandhi's politics.

All that she is prepared to say is that "it will be our endeavour to seek such further constitutional remedies and amendments as are

necessary to overcome the impediments in the path of social justice".

To repeat, this vaporous declaration is no call for a mandate. Soon after the Supreme Court's decision Mrs Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha and went to the country. But the manifesto on so crucial an issue is all vagueness.

It must be said that on a few other issues it does offer a clear statement of policy. But one wonders why a party which is in power did not say these very things earlier.

Bickering Alliance

To come to the deliberations of the four-party co-ordination committee, they ended on January 25 with agreement on 300 of the 520 Lok Sabha seats. The choices for the rest will be finalised at the State level.

It is, however, clear that the attitude of some of the parties in the committee's proceedings was to use the alliance to extract the maximum benefit for themselves rather than promote the interests of the alliance.



Minoo Masani

The committee could not agree on a joint electoral declaration. Judging by their petty bickerings, how can one expect these parties to run a government if they collectively win a majority of seats?

NO ASPIRATION

It is an odd situation. None of the four by itself aspires to a majority. That aspiration supposedly is by the alliance. And yet the alliance is a mere electoral adjustment designed to avoid conflict rather than to achieve and to promote common purposes.

The attitudes of Cong-O and the Jan Sangh in regard to Rajkot tell their own tale. They betray a cynical indifference to the obligations of an alliance worth the name.

All the more so when it is remembered that the Swatantra

Party's candidate, Mr M. R. Masani, is its chairman, an early and ardent advocate of the alliance, and, finally that he held the seat for nearly eight years, winning two elections.

SUPPORT WITHHELD

With the support of Cong-O and the Jan Sangh Masani's success would be a foregone conclusion. But that support is being withheld.

It is the same picture of disarray one finds as one turns to the "alliance systems" of the Ruling Congress.

Disagreements with the Bangla Congress and the DMK have progressed to the stage of deadlock.

The CPI sulks because there is no pact at the national level.

The PSP has been unceremoniously jilted.

What partners does Cong-I mean to select? None apparently. It means to go it alone. It is an ambitious venture.

FINAL OUTCOME?

What does it all mean for the country? A Cong-I government? A Cong-I dominated Coalition? A Coalition of Cong-O, Swatantra and Jan Sangh?

Whatever the ultimate outcome, little has been vouchsafed to the voter on the whole. He will be voting for images.

And only the future can tell how far these images correspond to the reality.