

CO-OPERATION OR COERCION?

THE Congress Party in its wisdom passed a resolution at Nagpur on Joint Cooperative Farming in January 1959. Since then with the zeal of the newly-converted, Congressmen have been mouth-ing loudly the slogan of Joint Cooperative Farming, claiming it to be a cure-all for all the ills of our countryside. Prime Minister Nehru, great "democrat" that he is, has even made it an article of faith for his docile followers, asking all those who do not agree with the Nagpur Resolution to get out of the Congress. He has not even spared his critics from his impatient out-bursts. Those who oppose the idea of Joint Cooperative Farming are, according to him, "trying to cheat the people" by mis-representing the Congress policies. They are doing so because "cooperative farming is a step towards socialism and, therefore, it might harm their vested interests." The vested interests that come in the way, he has therefore declared, would be swept aside with a "broomstick".

The passion and fury evident in Mr. Nehru's utterances on this subject betray the lack of conviction and confidence on the part of the Prime Minister and his Party colleagues, which are the inevitable result of the confused thinking and the doctrinaire approach of the ruling party which wants to concentrate more and more power in its own hands in the name of socialism.

Cooperation, undoubtedly, is a noble ideal and mutual cooperation for the common good should really form the basis of all human activity. *But any type of cooperative activity, to be genuine, must be absolutely free, democratic and voluntary.* The slightest hint of coercion in any shape or form is incompatible with the true conception of cooperation.

The Swatantra Party whole-heartedly supports all types of cooperative activity, as it strongly believes in the principle of genuine cooperation. In fact, many of its leaders have pioneered cooperative move-ments in the country in various fields long before the Congress Government suddenly discovered the merits of the cooperative approach.

In India, more than 70% of the popu-lation is engaged in agriculture. Though

ours is predominantly an agricultural country, the yield per acre is one of the lowest in the world. The object of cooperation in agriculture should, therefore, be two-fold: to increase food production and, at the same time, to generate forces that would stimulate the free development of the peasant's personality. This alone will strengthen our democracy and bring about prosperity to the countryside.

True cooperation in agriculture must take into consideration various factors that have a vital bearing on agricultural productivity. The latter depends much more on the personal interest of the farmer than that of the worker in industry. In industry, a worker can function effectively even if he is utterly uninterested in work, because the work is highly impersonalised and mechanised. But intensive farming is not a matter of routine. The yield of the land depends directly on the *care* with which the peasant cultivates and conserves the soil and protects the crop. Hired workers or members of large cooperatives can hardly be expected to cultivate the soil as intensively and well as the peasant proprietors or their tenants with secured long-term rights. This sense of property is so deep-rooted in the psychology of the Indian peasant and his attachment to the land is so strong that any proposal which deprives him of the independent rights of cultivation and cropping in land arouses his deep and instinctive hostility.

Thus, any cooperative activity in agriculture, to be genuine and fruitful, must respect the peasant's attachment to his own land and his sturdy sense of individualism. Agricultural cooperation, therefore, can take many forms like cooperative credit and service cooperatives. But the essence of genuine cooperation in agriculture is that the peasant must own and cultivate his own land. Then alone can the peasant feel that he is free and self-employed, toiling for his own betterment. This feeling would naturally give him an incentive for more efforts which would also benefit the country through increased production.

The Swatantra Party strongly supports such type of cooperative activity. It is the ruling party which does not believe in voluntary cooperative activity and wants, in the name of cooperation, compulsorily to herd peasants together in fake cooperatives and destroy their freedom and reduce them to the status of serfs. The Nagpur

Resolution of the Congress states: "the future agrarian pattern should be that of cooperative joint farming in which the land shall be pooled for joint cultivation." "As a first step", the Resolution lays down, "prior to the institution of joint farming, service cooperatives should be organised throughout the country. This stage should be completed within a period of three years." Thus what the Congress intends to do is to uproot the boundaries of individual farms and pool the holdings of different farmers in big collective farms as has been done in Soviet Russia or China. Of course, these big collective farms will still be euphemistically called "cooperative farms", just as even today the communist rulers in Russia and China describe their collective farms as cooperatives. But, then, the peasant will not be the master of his own land. When the boundaries of the farm are uprooted and when it merges, along with many others, into a big mass of land, it ceases to be the personal property of the peasant who retains his property right only on paper. As a result, the peasant is deprived of his land and reduced to the position of a landless labourer in the service of the so-called cooperative controlled by the local bosses who act as officials or managers of the cooperative. Thus the Nagpur resolution aims at taking away, in three years the peasant's property from him without actually telling him so. The Prime Minister has accused his critics of trying to cheat the people; but let the people judge who is trying to cheat whom.

By insisting that cooperative farming should necessarily lead to pooling of land and joint management, the Congress has brought the very concept of cooperation into disrepute. Of course, the Congress leaders do insist that this whole process is going to be voluntary, and no coercion will be used to force the peasant into joining the cooperatives. But, then, the Congress leaders are talking, in the same breath, of "targets" to be achieved in forming cooperatives. For example, the Central Deputy Minister for Planning, Mr. S. N. Mishra, announced in April 1959, that the Government intended to form as many as 3 lakh cooperatives during 1959-62, so that the network covers the whole of the rural population. How targets and voluntary cooperation can go together only the Congress leaders could tell. The Government cannot lay down a target unless it

intends to resort to coercive tactics to achieve that target. And this is exactly what the Congress Government has decided in order to make the farmer join even service cooperatives. For example, the Working Group on Cooperative Policy, set up by the Central Ministry of Food & Agriculture, has advocated in 1959, that "only members of village cooperative societies should be eligible for the supply of seeds, fertilisers, taccavi loans, and other facilities made available by Governments." Thus by employing discriminatory practices in conferring governmental benefits, to which all citizens should be entitled as a matter of right, the Government wants to force the farmers into joining cooperatives. And after the completion of the 3-year period, we have already been warned, "the land shall be pooled for joint cultivation." The tone of this statement should leave no one in doubt about the nature of Congress-type cooperation.

The Congress leaders have advanced some reasons in support of their advocacy of joint cooperative farming. The first is that it will increase agricultural production. This claim is contrary to the actual experience of all the countries in the world who have tried joint cooperative or collective farming. Production, in fact, has invariably gone down wherever this type of cooperative farming has been tried. The principal assumption underlying this experiment is that large-scale farming increases production. This is simply not true. Statistics of rice and wheat produced throughout the world show that countries having small farms, like ours, produce more per acre than countries with big farms. America and Russia are the two prominent countries in the world with big farms; but both have relatively low yields of wheat. America produces 12.2 quintals per hectare and Russia 9.3 quintals per hectare. On the contrary countries with small farms produce more per hectare than these two big countries. In the U.K., with small farms, the figure is 28.5 quintals and in Japan, whose average holdings are smaller than ours, the figure is 22.6 per hectare. The same is the case with rice production. The U.S.A. produces 28.3 quintals per hectare, the U.S.S.R. 25 quintals and Japan, with smaller farms, produces 48.5 quintals per hectare. It is true that agricultural holdings in India are exceedingly small, but the average size of Japanese holdings is almost

one fourth that of Indian holdings. Even then Japanese agricultural production per acre is one of the highest in the world. And even in India, large scale farming has proved to be incapable of increasing production. A study made by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute of Sugarcane production is quite revealing. It shows that ploughing by bullocks yielded 410 maunds of sugarcane; ploughing with tractors upto 6 inches, 361.5 maunds and with tractors upto 10 inches, 356 maunds.

The second claim of the Congress is that joint cooperative farming would increase employment. This claim is really amazing as it violates all rules of logic and common-sense. By pooling land, and by bringing in methods of mechanisation, the need for labour is actually reduced. And in America or Russia, large-scale farming is adopted precisely because of the shortage of manpower prevailing in those countries. To claim, therefore, that cooperative farming will increase employment opportunities is, to say the least, to strain the credulity of the people too far.

The Congress-type cooperative farming will thus not only adversely affect our food production, but will also increase unemployment and totally disrupt the fabric of our rural society. Still the Congress leaders are bent upon pursuing their pernicious policy as, according to them, it is "part of the socialist pattern". But even this claim is totally unfounded. All adherents of democratic socialism in the world have long ago discarded joint cooperative farming as an undemocratic and harmful experiment. The late Mr. Aneurin Bevan, a prominent leader of the British Labour Party, during his last visit to our country, warned our leaders that "the application of the principle of collectivisation, mechanisation and centralised control has proved a failure in the field of agriculture."

But there is a method in the madness of the ruling party. It is not that these leaders do not or cannot see the harmful effects of their policies. In fact, these policies follow from the Marxist thinking of certain Congress leaders. Marxists and socialists want to obliterate the peasants as a class by putting agriculture too on a "factory" basis, i.e. by reducing the farmer to the status of a landless labourer who would be totally at the mercy of the all-powerful State. Karl Marx, in his *Communist Manifesto*, has characterised peasants as "petty

bourgeoisie," as an unstable and reactionary class. Marxists have, therefore passed a death sentence upon the peasant in the interest of "socialism". The Soviet Union and China have, following Marxist reasoning, tried to exterminate the independent peasantry by resorting to methods of collective farming and people's communes. The result has proved disastrous. Millions of peasants have been massacred in communist countries as they refused to be enslaved by their communist masters. Yet Russia has still not been able to raise her agricultural production above the pre-war level and China is now facing the most serious famine in her entire history.

The ruling Congress Party is trying to emulate the communist example, and the results are bound to be equally harmful to our peasantry and the country. Even an eminent Congress leader like Charan Singh, Minister for Home Affairs in the U.P., has been constrained to sound a note of warning against the suicidal policy of his own party leaders. Condemning the Congress creed of joint cooperative farming as "not a case of true cooperation", but as intended to prepare "the ground for authoritarian control" Mr. Charan Singh, in his book *Joint Farming X-Rayed*, has warned the country that the "survival of the country and its freedom—the democratic way of life—are at stake," if the Congress leaders are allowed to implement their lunatic policies.

But the lone voice of persons like Mr. Charan Singh is a cry in the wilderness, as their leaders are too intoxicated with power to listen to any rational arguments. The Swatantra Party has come into existence precisely for the purpose of combating these fraudulent and anti-democratic policies of the Congress and of saving our democracy from extinction. While the Congress wants to sacrifice the peasant at the altar of Socialism, the Swatantra Party desires that our country's economic progress should be achieved through democratic methods with a vigorous, self-employed peasantry as its solid base.

The Swatantra Party stands for the defence of Farm and Family.