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POLITICAL COMMENTARY

MILITANCY FOR ITS OWN SAKE
HAS HARDLY HELPED SSP

By DILIP MUKERJEE

THE SSP was not born to greatness, but it looked for a time as if greatness might be thrust on it by a combination of circumstances. The circumstances have now changed, exposing the party to the danger of losing its raison d'être. This is the real nature of the crisis in which the party finds itself caught. But instead of facing the problem squarely its leadership is resorting to a succession of gimmicks, each more ludicrous than the other.

Returning from the Hardwar session of the SSP national executive, Mr Madhu Limaye had to acknowledge that there was a definite swing away from non-Congressism, the sheet-anchor of the party's philosophy. Having no alternative course to suggest immediately, Mr Limaye found a way out of the quandary in straightforward chauvinism, as SSP leaders have often done in the past.

He held before the youth of India four places of "pilgrimage"—Kutch, Lathi Tilla, Bara Hoti and, even tiny, uninhabited Kachchativu. Whatever the justification for the first three choices, the fourth is exceedingly unfortunate. Ceylonese public opinion, unaware of the compulsions behind Mr Limaye's stunts, may conjure up the possibility of an attempt to browbeat a small and friendly neighbour. Has Mr Limaye bothered to take into account the danger to India's interests in this area if such suspicions are created in Ceylon?

The politics of irresponsibility which the SSP has made its hallmark reflects the tortuous search the party has been making to carve out a niche for itself in the Indian political scene. The Congress has pre-empted the ground in the middle; and it is clear from the PSP's plight that variations upon the middle-of-the-road theme are altogether unrewarding. The ground to the Left is being monopolized by the Communists of several descriptions, leaving little room for others. For a time, SSP leaders like Mr Limaye harped on the Communists' "extra-territorial" loyalties to discredit them, but this did not succeed. Eventually, the SSP was to become a closer ally of the Left—Communists than of the Right—witness the alliances it struck with the former in Madras and West Bengal at the last General Election.

The SSP, learning from the experience of the Praja Socialists, shuns the middle ground in politics. Since the ground to the Left is monopolized by the Communists, it has been reduced to building its appeal on militancy for its own sake, and worse still on irrelevancies. The advantage it gained at the last election by correctly sensing the popular disenchantment with the Congress proved a wasting asset, the more so because the SSP's extravagant postures undermined what little hope there was of stable alternative Government. To cover up this bankruptcy, and also to paper over the growing cracks in its ranks, it has resorted to empty heroics as over Kutch, and more regrettably over Kachchativu. Fortunately there are some signs of a change, holding out the hope that it may yet come to provide a vehicle for the radical urges of the people, especially in the less politically evolved Hindi areas.

Jana Sangh, which was on the contrary softening its line to give itself better leverage in the South. The SSP's zeal for Hindi was most noticeable in U.P., the State where its competition with the Jana Sangh is the keenest. By contrast, Bihar—then ruled by a SSP-led Government—was a haven of peace.

Consider also the SSP stand on caste. Backward classes certainly need a break, but since everybody accepts this the SSP had to go one better to promise them a 60% share in jobs and political office. The calculation may have been that this championship will help the party to gain ground at the expense of both the Jana Sangh with its high-caste hierarchy, and the Communists. The latter operating on class lines are averse to treating backwardness as a caste phenomenon, and hence the advantage the SSP hopes to gain by peddling a straight caste appeal.

This is not all. The SSP strategists correctly identified the political mileage to be got out of student unrest. Here again was a field in which the Communists held sway, working through students with a mind. Aiming at the mindless multitude, the SSP wrote into its election manifesto a promise to increase the percentage of passes at examinations!

But for all its follies, the SSP

did so more quickly than many expected because of the instability and in-fighting that characterized the make-shift non-Congress combinations. For hastening the disillusion, the SSP must bear a major share of the blame: almost before the coalitions got going, its leadership got busy striking extravagant postures to pre-empt plaudits from the public for itself.

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THE difficulties the SSP has run into over programmes and policies are vexing enough, but it has in addition got caught up in squabbles at the top following the passing of Dr Lohia. Mr S. M. Joshi is as Chairman the formal head of the party, but it is no secret that both Mr Raj Narain and Mr Limaye have an eye on the top job. The fact that Mr Raj Narain belongs to the Hindi-speaking belt—the main area of the SSP's strength—gives him an advantage, which Mr Limaye is seeking to undo by exaggerated zeal in the cause of Hindi. Unable to match Mr Raj Narain's exhibitionism in Parliament, Mr Limaye is busy perfecting a technique of negativism—witness his refusal to join the consultations Mrs Gandhi held on Assam's re-organization or on Kutch.

The squabbling at the top is giving an impetus to factionalism below, with Mr Joshi trying ineffectually to hold the balance. At the conference of the Bihar party, Press reports spoke of pandemonium as Mr Karpuri Thakur, who has a reputation for sobriety, clashed with a Young Turk, Mr Bhola Prasad Singh. In West Bengal, the party conference at Bankura witnessed a struggle for power culminating in one group being excluded from elective offices.

In U.P., 18 out of 44 MLAs flouted the party directive to vote for its candidate in the election for the Rajya Sabha held a few weeks ago. The rebel leader has been threatened with expulsion by the local party, but the national executive is dragging its feet—evidently because the rebel has Mr Limaye's sympathy.

In Kerala, the revolt of the local leadership against the national has been pressed to the point of a final break. In Maharashtra, Mr George Fernandez finds himself at odds with champions of all-inclusive non-Congressism, who, with an agenda

will begin on July 15, the Finance Minister, Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan, declared at a Press conference here today.

The first draw will be on August 5. It will be a monthly draw thereafter.

There will be 367 prizes and the 1st prize will be valued at Rs 5,000. The price of a ticket will be one rupee.

The commission for ticket sellers will be 25%. This, Dr Chauhan opined, would provide jobs to unemployed people.

Sale bureaux will be opened in England and Canada, where a large number of Punjabis live. Offices will also be opened in each state.

HARYANA STAFF END AGITATION

RESPONSE TO CHIEF MINISTER'S CALL

From Our Special Representative

CHANDIGARH, June 20.—Haryana Government employees today unconditionally called off their six-month-old agitation.

During the protracted agitation, the employees struck twice and organized a chain hunger-strike.

Involved in the agitation were about 100,000 employees affiliated to the Haryana Subordinate Services Federation.

Their principal demand was that the payment of dearness allowance on Central scale should be given retrospective effect from May, 1967, as allowed to the Punjab staff. The Haryana Governor, Mr B. N. Chakravarti conceded it only from December 1967. The new Chief Minister Mr Bansilal, "declined to bend" on this issue.

He asked for an unconditional withdrawal of the agitation before he could consider their demands.

Mr Gurdas Ram, president of the federation, announced at a Press conference today the withdrawal of the agitation "as a gesture of goodwill".

He appealed to the 12 hunger-strikers to break their fast.

The announcement was made in presence of the Health Minister Mr Khurshid Ahmed. Later Mr Khurshid Ahmed and another Minister, Mr Ram Dhari, Guar left for Ambala to meet the rest of the hunger-strikers now lodged in jail.

Centre Willing To Compensate States

JAIPUR, June 20.—The Centre is reported willing to compensate the State Governments for five years up to 50% of the losses incurred because of prohibition, reports UNI.

This was conveyed by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Morarji Desai, in a letter to Mr Roop Narain, general secretary of the All-India Prohibition Committee.

In a Press release, the Rajasthan Prohibition Committee said today that Mr Desai had, however, made it clear that the Centre cannot compensate the States in full.

Raj Narain Wants Inquiry Into Ghazipur Firing

VARANASI, June 20.—The Socialist leader, Mr Raj Narain today demanded a judicial inquiry into the recent police firing in Ghazipur in which three persons were killed and a few injured, reports PTL.

Addressing a Press conference here, he said the satyagraha launched by the party had been successful and about 6,000 workers courted arrest in U.P.

In democracy, Mr Raj Narain said, it was the fundamental right of political parties to raise their voice against unjust laws in a peaceful way. The Government on its part should take just action according to the gravity of the defiance of law. Action beyond the limits of law should not be resorted to.

OTHER

From Our Correspondent

JULLUNDUR, June 20.—Majest Singh Bhathia of Dhan Mohalla and Mahesh of Punjpeer Badi here stabbed each other yesterday following tension between two factions on account of an eve-teasing incident.

Both were admitted to hospital in a serious condition.

The police registered a case of attempt to murder against each of them.

In another occurrence in the Rasta Bazar area four people were seriously injured following an altercation between a house owner and his tenant. The tenant had insisted on sleeping in the yard against the wishes of the house owner. The injured persons, who were taken to hospital included the tenant's daughter. Some arrests were made.

U.P. WANTS PHONE FACTORY AT NAINI

From Our Correspondent

Government has pleaded for setting up a telephone factory at Naini, Allahabad, and a tractor factory at Ramnagar in Varanasi district in the public sector.

It has assured the Central Government that there would be no difficulty in providing power, water and land for the two projects.

An official spokesman said yesterday that the telephone factory would cost Rs 60 crores and the tractor factory Rs 30 crores.

JHARKHANDE RAI ARRESTED

LUCKNOW, June 20.—Over 2,000 Communists agitating for the landless through-

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