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AKSHI

The assassination of Martin Luther King has shocked the world and let loose violent disturbances in the United States. Though, according to one shrewd observer, very few Negroes who responded to his leadership knew very much about Mahatma Gandhi, Mr. King's contribution to the cause of the American Negro was towards making him conscious of his rights and responsibilities as part of the American nation. Over the years he had come to be the symbol of non-violent assertion of this. This is demonstrated by the violence that has burst out on his being murdered. President Johnson has done more for pressing the rights of Negroes than other Presidents and it is deplorable that all this should have taken place at the tail-end of his term. It has been natural for comparisons to be made with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi but there is one basic difference: King's murderer was not a Negro who thought the policy of non-violence was wrong. And that is reflected in the aftermath of the murder. Indians who were spared that ugly twist in 1948, will sympathise deeply with the American people in their ordeal.

Vietnam

Political commentators on the American scene have been acutely aware until recently of the absence of an alternative to President Johnson's much-criticised Vietnam Policy, concluding that in the circumstances his re-election was a certainty. But President Johnson himself has saved his rivals the problem of extrication by announcing a change of policy and a determination not to run for office. Critics in America and peace-

makers outside it might consider this decision a vindication of their propaganda and pressures. But President Johnson's attitude is clearly one of not wanting others to do his patching up for him, and, from the evidence, it would seem that Hanoi fully shares his anxiety to settle the dispute directly. Though it has not stopped other governments from offering their good offices, it is very clear that President Johnson proposes to follow his own programme. Obviously too, his initiative caught the nations napping. Otherwise, there would not be so much effort expended in the futile business of explaining what influenced him to take it.

Indiscipline

The tame process of electing members to the Rajya Sabha has precipitated a crisis in the Swatantra Party because of disunion in its Gujarat Unit. The State Assembly there was called on to elect three members, two of them being in the control of the majority Congress party. Prior to the 1967 general elections, the Swatantra Party had promised to support an independent member of the Gujarat Assembly, Mr. Babubhai Vaidya from Rajkot, in these elections. The commitment, it would appear, was made at the highest level. In the actual elections, it was not honoured, many of the Gujarat members rejecting the party whip and helping to return a Mr. Mahida, a member of the party who refused to stand down and contested the election as an independent. It adds to the confusion to find that this flouting of the whip has led to the resignation of some Gujarat leaders of the party and Mr. M. R. Masani's resignation from the party's central executive. A commitment of this kind is binding on the party as a whole, and

the Realist

OURSELVES TO BLAME

In a general way, the second session of the United Nations Conference on Aid, Trade and Development closed its lengthy sitting in the way it was expected to do. Beginning as it did on a note of discontent on the part of aid-receiving countries, it ended with little achieved by way of getting assurances of more aid.

This should be a lesson on the futility of an aggrieved attitude. Basically, the developing nations are in trouble because they have tended to regard aid as a permanent rather than temporary factor and failed to consider seriously how best to utilize what they received. As a matter of fact, the insistence on aid-giving countries being wholly altruistic was bad policy. The arguments which give trade preference over aid, are equally valid in the strings which could be attached to aid. After all, it is reasonable to expect a nation to be more interested in the economic development of another nation when it has its own prosperity directly linked up with it.

While it may be possible to convince the affluent nations that their own interest lies in helping the others, even helping them liberally, it is another matter to try to pin them down to any figure so definite as one percent of their national income. Even if it had been accepted, the Conference had no means of ensuring performance. It could only record the non-fulfilment of the target. In the circumstances, the main consideration at the tail-end of the session appears to have been the fear of allowing it to conclude without some agreement to show.

So far as the symptoms of broader thinking on the part of the advanced nations went, much has been said but it is difficult to assess how much of it sprang from the realization that it was purposeless to argue over principles so long as the discussion was general. The boycotts and walk-outs to demonstrate disapproval of some nation or other were ridiculous — the anti-South African one particularly creating some childish interludes as the permanent chairman, India's Dinesh Singh, slithered out of his chair every time the South African delegate rose to speak. On one occasion, the substitute chairman was in fact from another country which shared the revulsion at South Africa's policy, and ordinary courtesy to him should have decided India to shoulder the embarrassment rather than slide it on to another.

all the office-bearers ought to have taken concerted action at both State and national level. The normal course naturally is expulsion of recalcitrant members. Even conceding that the position in Gujarat was not one which permitted of this action, there is no reason why at the all India level the step was not taken of disaffiliating the Gujarat unit. The post-election performance of the party in that State has not reflected credit on the Swatantra Party, since it has engaged in a process of writing itself off. Nor has its handling of this particular issue been very commendable. The commitment ought to have been resolved at the very outset by mutual agreement to set it aside the moment it was known that Swatantra support would be an embarrassment to any independent candidate. It reflects little credit to the party to leave a lurking suspicion that, had Mr. Vaidya stood on his own, he may well have secured the seat since the Congress could not very well support an opposition candidate against an independent one.

Noise Annoys

It is a great pity that interested parties and individuals never concern themselves with any research on the qualities that commend a candidate to his voters. I am sure that a serious study into their successes and failures would lead to the abandoning of the disgusting habit of scribbling on the walls of public and private buildings or pasting on them the names of the candidate and his party and the symbol by which the ordinary voter is meant to identify the man at the time of voting. In the recent Bombay civic elections, a new non-political group of sponsors sprang up, claiming an exclusive interest in the city's well-being. Unfortunately, this element proved as bad as the political parties in the business of disfiguring the walls. As for the noise let loose on the public, if it had been possible to identify the worst offenders, there would have been no room for doubting the public reaction. Evidently in our democracy there is no place for quiet explaining of the virtues of a candidate. Is it any wonder then that political defections should become common? I would very much like to see an election in which the public is neither shouted at nor visibly assailed with monstrous posters. If other voters with whom I have talked it over may be taken to represent the public of this city, my feelings are not by any means uncommon. No one whom I have met has cast his vote for a candidate because of his being shouted at. The irony of the situation is the fact that all this bawling out through loud speakers and wall-plastering costs money, and a vested interest has grown up in what can only be a nuisance to the citizens. I am glad that letters to the press — a small but significant trickle — are beginning to indicate public disgust. It is a sad

state of affairs that we cannot persuade the men and women who seek our votes to behave themselves.

Curbs on Defectors

The parliamentary committee to consider the confusion of defections has, after talking out a number of proposals, referred to the Union Home Ministry the question of looking into the extent of the practice and the manner in which other countries where multi-party democracies obtain deal with it. That the Ministry is asked to submit two working papers in a week or two suggests that nothing startling is expected of it. The move is no more than a manoeuvre to gain time. As a matter of fact, the whole issue is extremely simple. Given the determination to strengthen parliamentary democracy, there is no reason why appropriate remedies cannot be devised. For the basic point to be considered is that in elections in India men are elected not for the principles they hold but for considerations extraneous to political ideologies. The situation arising out of the 1967 General Elections varied in different States. In those States where dissatisfaction with the Congress brought together disparate elements the new governments lacked the cohesion to implement united front programmes and it needed very little time for the realization that an alternative to the Congress just did not exist. Surprisingly, within a year the antipathy of some sections of the coalitions to the Congress weakened though the public statements of their colleagues and themselves served to keep up the public mood.

Ministers By The Dozen

The uncertain States provide fertile soil for the crop of defectors. Yet it is wrong to conclude that political conditions will remain uncertain once they have been brought to this stage. There are indications that in some parts of the country at least the public is tiring of impasses, crises and political adventurism, reacting at times by a reversion to the Congress. All crusts by definition are tough to break through. Ten years would not be too long a period for the defecting habit to become unrewarding. The main objection to 'floor-crossing' is that it raises the holding of office above, and even to the exclusion of, the business of government. Indian experience has as a whole not indicated that more secure ministers have utilized their freedom from politicking discreetly — not to mention the irrelevant matter of the public interest. Political power is a means to an end and, when the end is not good government, power becomes an end in itself. The transition from one-party rule in a democracy to something else is always an awkward period, the more so where it is not sudden. Just at present, the public mind, guided smoothly by seasoned politicians with a

vested interest in party politics, is obsessed by the horrors of defection. However, it is not without its brighter side. When a ministership, even a chief ministership, can be had for nothing more arduous than changing one's political label, one may accept the fact that, on the one hand, office will lose its importance and, on the other, that at the reduced level more politicians will be considered as likely to make the ministerial grade. The straightforward formula of a political party requiring the support of half-plus-one of the elected members of a legislature and a chief minister requiring a following of half-plus-one of his party legislators has proved to be deceptively simple, with the result that minority leaders and independents have acquired a virtue, distinct from personal merit as well as from the size of the following. And inevitably this has led to outsize ministries. We could well have bidders for ministerships in some states with no other qualification than half-a-dozen docile legislators at their beck and call. Nothing could be more ludicrous than a ministry of dissenters which we have seen in Bihar, held in place by a Congress not prepared to assume office. The corrective to all this is for political parties to draft programmes less intended to impress and more expressive of their definite convictions. Moreover, the "consensus" method is not the approach most helpful for policy-framers to pursue. The Congress Party hitherto reaped the fullest advantage from vagueness and ambiguity but, now that it is not the only road to office, it will have to strive after clarity and be prepared to stand or fall by its programme. Naturally, those who do not subscribe to a party's opinions will have no place in it. The Congress has not been able to work on this basis but it will find it impossible to ignore it in future. Any mechanical device to avoid political clarity and impose conformity will fail to check defections. A by-product of the political climate after the 1967 elections is the pressure from state units on national executives which all parties are finding difficult to handle. This is most apparent on the issues of forming ministries where caution and the long-term calculations of all-India parties count for little against the immediate prospect of assuming power. It is not improbable that out of this stress there might emerge party reflections of the federal structure.

Narrowed Horizons

It is an interesting feature of current trends that this same indifference to programmes has resulted in the rise of regional parties and their phenomenal success, for these perforce develop local grievances and stress the indifference of national parties to them. It would be idle to deny

that this kind of neglect has existed, preoccupation with generalities filtering even into the proceedings of municipal bodies. Not so long ago, politicians in West Bengal were anticipating, in place of the All India party pattern branching into the States and unable to satisfy or overcome regional pressures, a synthesis of regional parties coming together to form an effective government at the centre. Such a set-up, it is argued, might succeed where more pretentious 'national' parties have failed. The idea is obviously not an ideal solution but it has the advantage of pursuing what is a strong trend, working its way out against older political traditions; a kind of revolt of younger men rejecting the very foundations of the preceding generation. At the same time, we must remember that belief in less-than national loyalties, in the efficacy of promoting cordial relations between quarrelling sectors by clear-cut partitions, and in intractable behaviour is no

Two Approaches

Two recent statements on family planning bring out the methods pursued by the Government agencies and those of a big private enterprise in a company town. Dr. Chandrasekhar has outlined the programme of the Government without any attempt to excuse mistakes or to cover up failures. Mr. R. S. Pande whose personal interest in the programme of Tata Iron and Steel Company at Jamshedpur has stimulated its implementation, offers an assessment of the work and his own ideas of what is needed to make family planning effective. Both proceed from the common thesis that India can afford no more to neglect a problem which has nullified all efforts at purposeful development planning. They are given on other pages.

new feature of the Indian scene. In a way it may be regarded as a hangover from caste excesses and purdah practices, of the basic intolerance under the veneer of tolerance suggested by attitudes built upon concepts like "The world is large enough to contain all types provided they do not crowd upon one another." Of course, in its most catching form this assumes the shape of opening up jobs to one regional section by throwing out another and it is somehow part of current politics that regionalism is inherently good — whether in education or in employment. It is unfortunate that in a frantic attempt to seem to be doing something, some leaders are reverting to the old manoeuvre of blaming the press. Considering how few people are able to read, this is disingenuous. Is it too much to expect politicians to behave themselves and eschew the less reputable methods of wooing votes? Not all might be prepared but some at least ought to set an example.