

To be Somebody

To be somebody or to do something is the question in our country, at least that ought to be the question. So long has philosophy and religion ennobled the idea of pure or excellent being in this country, that the idea of doing has been relegated to a secondary if not an unpleasant role. Let a man cleanse himself of ignoble ideas and emotions. Let him free himself from the base passions of arrogance, envy or selfish expansion, in short, climbing. Let him try to achieve purity of being, for, otherwise, the cycle of rebirth cannot be broken.

A few Yogis may have attained this ideal and in fact some types of social organisation in the past may have in some measure achieved success. Today, this idea of excellent or pure being stays on paper for almost all our countrymen, but they have not as a result taken to the idea of doing. Somehow excellence of being has degenerated into the desire to achieve status, to be a big shot, to be soft spoken, polite but to intrigue and manoeuvre, not to make enemies or at least too many of them, if possible, to do nothing, but to hold on to one's position and climb.

All politics in this country after the achievement of Independence have suffered from this disease of inaction. Government and opposition consist almost entirely of men who would rather be something than do something. That is why the usual propensity of the Indian to stop at making declarations has received further impetus. Talk is the essential question. To make a declaration of what has to be done in future is the essential point. Then, to quarrel about these declarations that have no meaning for the present and that relate to a future that will never come becomes a main activity of politicians. The people too watch this play with intense interest. They have become used to life of negation but continual talk.

For 20 long years Congress ministers had specialised at this skill of acquiring positions and bettering their fortunes without doing anything at all or at least not much. This evil inheritance fell to the lot of non-Congress ministers. On the whole, they have maintained that tradition. They have sometimes had to carry out measures, which departed somewhat from old established routines. But they did not stretch out their necks too long or too often. To continue in the position that they have come to occupy became their main occupation.

We are no cliff-hangers. What is the use of an existence in which one just manages to keep alive without being able to do anything at all. We would much rather that these non-Congress ministries engage in action that would mean a break with the past, that would change conditions, that would destroy old relationships in society and re-fashion them. This would involve taking of risks. If in the process of this activity, non-Congress ministries suffer a temporary defeat either at the hands of assembly manoeuvres or because of manipulations at the centre, this will itself be an instrument of progress.

Cliff-hanging over a long period must inevitably bring disaster. The will and capacity to take risks in the cause of social and economic progress may mean a temporary failure but will inevitably bring ultimate success.

Some kind of voodoo exists in our politics today. On the one hand, non-Congress ministries and their parties in the various states are afraid of losing power and bringing the Congress Party back into seats of authority and on the other these very parties are nervous about attempting a combination at the

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centre. One of the reasons why they are so chary of combining at the centre may well be the desire not to annoy or anger the central Congress command, on whose mercies these parties think they have to depend for their continued existence in the states. This must inevitably cripple their capacity to do anything worthwhile in the states.

Furthermore, this fear of Congress coming back to power in this state or that state, when it is so very much in power at the centre, deserves to be psychiatrically examined. In the first place, why should the Congress come back to power? A number of combinations and permutations of totally new types have emerged. Secondly, if the Congress Party comes back to power as a result of the non-Congress parties attempting to achieve a radical transformation of society, that power shall indeed be, exceedingly short-lived. The Congress will earn further infamy or loss of strength. At any subsequent election or Parliamentary encounter, this Party may well be reduced to an insignificant existence.

Are these non-Congress parties capable of taking any risks in the months to come, even if they have not shown any heartwarming indications of it in the past few months? Leaders of these various parties have shown that they lack both conviction and will. But, not unoften have the rank and file of these various parties demonstrated their capacity to risk their lives or at least to suffer. Such occasions have indeed been rare. Most of the time, the rank and file have been silent spectators. But just those rare occasions, when they have striven hard for the success of a scheme or suffered imprisonment for one cause or another hold out a promise that the situation may still change.

What would be the best form of attack on the present ugliness? We do not think that the time has come for a new and effective party to be born. We also do not think that existing parties can singly achieve national re-construction. Even a crippled combination is not in sight, for although such a combination may not be able to achieve anything enduring or spectacular, it will have at least inspired the people with the new faith and hope that the Congress Party is out also at centre. There seems to be only one way out.

The people must try to build single aim organisations. Such organisations should be open to everybody. No particular party should be able to command them. The leadership of these organisations should, in significant measure, come from those who do not belong to any of the existing parties. But a majority, however, of this leadership will have to come from existing political parties which find it possible to subscribe to their aim.

Quite obviously, one such single aim organisation is and must be the fix or regulate prices conference. This conference has in the past had two annual meetings. But it is moribund in the last few years. In fact one may well forget its past. One could write on a clean slate. A difficulty will naturally arise as to how to fix prices.

Some will say that expansion of the public sector and state trading is the remedy. Some others will maintain that removal of controls and freeing of enterprise is the remedy. To us, these controversies appear irrelevant and even stupid in the Indian context. Business and bureaucracy have both failed. To trust either to do the job by itself would be the rankest folly. They have learnt each other's vices and whatever virtues the public sector or the private sector have in other countries, have more or less been given up in our country.

A main remedy is to attack the rot where it started. Excessive expenditure of the top crust, of just one per cent of the population, of 5 millions out of 500 millions, is where the rot started. To this must be added the ancillary rot of providing for relations, hangers on, and caste men and in some cases people who would otherwise create trouble as a result of unemployment. Any fix prices conference will therefore have to be at the same time a reduce excessive expenditure conference. We must make clear that bureaucracy spends not alone its salaries but as a general rule 10 times more by way of various amenities than what it obtains as salary. Aside from certain relationship which sale price must have to costs including transport or agricultural to industrial price, the entire population must experience the joy of equal scarcity in at least one significant commodity.

An irrigation volunteers conference could be another such single aim organisation. True enough,

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between the two millstones of indefensible luxury of the few and the ill nourishment and indolence of the many, volunteer work has just been ground out of existence. Among the many offences of the past twenty years is the crime that all work of national reconstruction has been brought in terms of profits and wages and similar payment. Nevertheless, volunteering is the pre-condition of national uplift. In the course of irrigation volunteering, questions of conflict relating to land redistribution, money-lenders' interest, minimum wages, poor man's homestead and the like will have to be brought to the fore, as also the central problem of our agriculture namely, simultaneous fixing of minimum production per acre and provision of minimum requirements for the purpose and confiscation of land in case of failure.

We will now only list single aim conferences, some of which have a record but have become moribund and therefore, all of which have to be started from scratch. Thirdly, the Angrezi Hatao Conference, fourthly, the End Caste Conference, fifthly, the Hindu-Muslim approximation and Indo-Pak Re-union Conference. About this fifth organisation, let it be only said that Hindu-Muslim approximation and Indo-Pak re-union are two sides of the same coin and one is impossible of attainment without the other. A sixth single aim organisation could simply be the Save Country Conference.

The country is beset with perils all round, disintegration almost all along the frontier in which foreigners also play a part and disintegration over the length and breadth of the country because of the rise of separatist nationalisms. Certain major disintegrations due to caste or language or income differences have already been shown as the scope of specific organizations like the End Caste Conference. Here we are dealing with the general peril and that can best be tackled by a Save Country Conference. A major peril certainly is the bureaucracy and the police, its tyranny on the one hand and corruption on the other. No one dares touch it, for the usage of many centuries of foreign rule has sanctified it. Once the remedy of abolition of collectors was suggested and, if that appears to be too drastic a remedy at the first shot, the people and the youth particularly must be organised to tame and curb the bureaucracy and

the police in some of its practices.

The word 'conference' should not be misled. It is not a mere annual gathering. It is a day by day affair. The word is preferred because no strict or elaborate constitution is necessary. These various conferences here suggested are an integrated whole arising out of the concept of equality through prosperity and prosperity through equality. But all the people may not be able to accept the whole. Some who will passionately devote their energies to the abolition of caste may have blind spots in regard to language and income differentiation and the reverse is also true. That is why these single aim organisations have been suggested in order that the maximum number of people may be mobilised.

The editors of the journal will be happy to receive letters from people wishing to organise one conference or another and activity centering around it in their own area. Those who are already officebearers of existing political organisations at whatever level will do well to assist these conferences not as office-bearers but as active members. Membership of a political party should, however, be no bar to officering in such a conference. These letters will be sifted by the editors of the journal and passed on to people competent enough to deal with them and further the activity. We must warn against the kind of action that leads to nothing, the issuing of statements to the press or assembling of messages of the allegedly great. What we need is person to person talk, house to house campaigning, local meetings, discussions and debates, which culminate in mass meetings or processions, Indolence has so affected our politics that the culmination takes place without adequate preparation. We hope that these various conferences will soon be set in motion and that they will succeed either in freshening up existing political parties or in time help build up a new and mighty political organisation that will change the face of the country.

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