

INDIA'S NEW RULING CLASS

Economic Outlook

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WITH important foreign statesmen arriving frequently on courtesy visits to India from East and West and with India's voice respectfully heard at the international councils, the observer is left with the impression that Mr Nehru's spectacular foreign policy is paying a high dividend and that Delhi is rapidly becoming one of the most important political centres of the world. Only on close scrutiny of the economic and social conditions does he get the impression of a scene reminiscent of Chancellor Brüning's Germany in the early thirties: a régime desperately trying to camouflage by real and imaginary diplomatic successes the fact that, domestically, it is sitting on a volcano.

In the cities the westernized ruling class—the British-trained civil servants and the American-inspired managing agency executives—seem to run the show at full swing. Although the shortage of technicians is still acute, there is a considerable tendency among the new generation to go in for scientific training. I was told by a university professor in Calcutta that the brightest students take up science these days.

Dr Deshpande, the Secretary-General of Hindu Mahasabha, the self-styled guardian of national traditions, assured me that the idea of a man working his way up—so essential to any industrial society—is by no means incompatible with the true principles of Hinduism; the rigidity of the caste system was the result of later corruption, but his Movement means to go back to the ancient sources.

On the face of it, therefore, there is no obstacle in the way of a new India, rising on the wings of modern technical production and re-invigorated Hindu tradition, utilizing vast, still untapped, raw material and manpower resources.

There is, however, a deep-rooted menace, not only to India's progress, but to her entire existence in the present form: the fissure left behind by the British Raj on the nation's body social,

one even wider than those caused by the caste system, or the religious and linguistic barriers. At a time when, in the free world, trade unionism and full employment have all but abolished social disparity, and when in Communist-dominated countries the leadership seeks to recruit a new élite preferably from the lowest strata of the old society, in India there is an unbridgeable rift between the westernized town-dwellers and the backward villagers.

It is not as if the best elements of urban India would not be anxious to shed all the social and educational differences. However, the membership of a ruling group cannot be abandoned nor assumed at will, nor can the gap between rulers and ruled be bridged easily however much those concerned would welcome change. The difference between the westernized ten per cent and the backward ninety per cent could only be eliminated if either the former would unlearn all that they know, or the latter catch up by learning all they have missed for generations. The first is impracticable and undesirable, the second, though most desirable, is for the time being equally impracticable in view of the fact that seventy per cent of the population is illiterate and, even to-day, about fifty per cent of the young children are growing up without schooling. While economic limitations and social conditions—e.g. the regrettable but understandable reluctance of young college graduates to become teachers in primitive villages—continue to make higher and often lower education the townsfolk privilege, the gap is more likely to widen than to narrow.

Moreover, the continuous unemployment among 'native' town-dwellers prevents the absorption into the urban economy even of those young people from the villages who somehow manage to obtain an education. There are, thus, educated young people in the cities who—unless they are extremely idealistic—would not settle down in the villages even if they could find a livelihood there as teachers, doctors, or administrators in the development schemes. There are, on the other hand, educated or semi-educated people in the villages who would be anxious to move to the cities, but they have little hope of finding work or accommodation there. So, in spite of all the genuine good intentions on the part of some lofty-minded individuals and all the progressive slogans reiterated with equal zeal by the Government and the Opposition, the social order of India to-day is as

near to the stultified two-class society envisaged by H. G. Wells in *The Time Machine* as any human society is ever likely to be.

The ten per cent westernized ruling class is conscious of and deeply concerned with the inherent danger of the situation and aware of the disheartening fact that there is so little they can do about it. The hustle and bustle in the cities is, therefore, not so much the symptom of an expanding economy, but rather like the preparation for a siege. As long as the technically developed westernized India—the India of the main cities and ports—cannot expand to embrace the whole of the sub-continent, it remains threatened, now that the ‘imperial umbrella’ no longer protects it, of being re-absorbed into the ‘Asian’ countryside and forced to abandon its accustomed way of life.

The fear of their rural kinsmen—in particular of the pressure of their numbers—explains the eagerness with which urban Indians seized the idea of family planning. They consider every new-born Indian baby in the villages a potential soldier in a hostile army or, at any rate, a dangerous unit of additional fuel to an impending explosion. I heard an Indian health official complaining that, had the British not been unco-operative during the Raj-period, the Indian civil servants could have started with family planning long ago. To-day, these people feel an alarm over the half-success of the experiment with the ‘rhythmical method’ of birth control which, looked at broadly, is worse than complete failure. While the birth-rate was reduced within the city-bounds, the countryside—the 600,000 villages with practically no medical assistance—remained unaffected. The danger of the urban population being swamped by backward villagers has increased, not diminished, as a result of the abortive experiment. While there are already voices heard in favour of more ‘dynamic’ methods of birth-control—including sterilization!—the practical difficulties of implementation, quite apart from moral objections, appear to be insuperable.

Meanwhile the ‘passive menace’ from the villages is becoming steadily more and more activated.

The most important personality in the developing anti-city campaign is Acharya Vinoba Bhave, whose activities are not sufficiently appreciated by those who regard him merely as a pious land-reformer. He does wander around the country in an untiring effort to obtain voluntary land-offerings for the landless,

but his ultimate aims are far more ambitious than settling a number of peasants on the often poor quality soil, or to secure the admission of Harijans into hitherto exclusive temples. He seeks to rouse the countryside against the cities which he regards as malign growths on the landscape, conducting a parasitic existence at the expense of the villages. Indeed, he urges his followers, as Gandhi did, to develop cottage industries in rural areas in order that they may shake off the economic yoke of the city. However, while Gandhi directed his economic emancipation movement against those whom he considered colonial exploiters, Vinoba means to apply the same sanctions against his own urbanized countrymen.

Nevertheless, Vinoba is a man of peaceful intentions and he emphasizes that his ends would, in the long run, benefit the town-dwellers themselves. They would, he says, be forced to abandon their idle existence and resort to manual labour which would, in Vinoba's opinion, give them health and happiness. However, bearing in mind the history of the Indian independence movement, we may be assured that, in the same manner as Gandhi was followed by more radical disciples—ranging from Jawaharlal Nehru to Baghat Singh and Subhas Chandra Bose—soon new faces are likely to be seen round the aged Vinoba and new voices heard expressing new ideas. These younger people, complementing Vinoba's teachings with action techniques inspired by Left or Right, will have less patience and less inclination to limit their activities with the golden rules of *satyagraha*. In India where Subhas Chandra Bose—friend of Hitler and ally of the Japanese Emperor—could remain the hero and become the martyr of the Left-wing intellectuals and masses, political inconsistency cannot be unusual.

Naturally, the ruling class in the cities is not going to sit with folded hands in the face of the danger, but will use all its influence on the Government, the civil service, the political parties, the private and public sector of the economy, to repress the gathering storm.

Police measures are going to be tightened up: the police force was reinforced by the admission of ex-members of the pro-Japanese 'Indian National Army' some time ago. These measures are to ensure the continued control by the Delhi Government, and by those who are behind it. It was in line with the increasing

centralization that they decided to resolve the conflicting Gujerathi and Marathi claims on Bombay by taking the city under the direct control of the central government; a decision that resulted in a long series of riots and bloodshed.

Foreign investments are sought from all over the world to strengthen and expand the urban economy, but it is conveniently forgotten that it was the foreign commercial rivalry on Indian soil that led to the loss of independence three hundred years ago.

Certain individuals, particularly in the upper strata of the ruling class, and the Anglo-Indian community who form a minority within the westernized minority, are seeking their own salvation by emigration to those parts of the free world where they are allowed to enter. Great Britain is ranking high as a potential 'home from home' for people with capital, connections and professional qualifications.

Some other individuals, mostly but not exclusively in the lower strata of the ruling class, echo the catch-phrase of 'Communism rather than Communalism'. They have, besides the general Communist objectives, certain ends of their own in mind: they prefer the ruthless yet well-channelled Communist transformation to the hazards of a rural revolution. What is more, they are attracted by the prospect that, whatever else they may or may not do, the Communists can be trusted to maintain, true to their basic principles, the supremacy of the city over the countryside. Indian Communism is, in this way, developing paradoxically enough a definite counter-revolutionary feature: in the seething struggle between the dominating cities and awakening villages it stands on the side of the *status quo*, not of reform.

Although the picture is gloomy, there is still the possibility that the septuagenarian Nehru will be succeeded by someone capable of bringing together urban and rural India in harmony and prosperity. He will have to be a man of extreme energy and unbounded vision, capable of harnessing to his own ends the forces of both traditionalism and radicalism.