

Capital View

Optimism Crossed By Pessimism

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SEVERAL statements made over the last week came into a kind of suggestive conjunction and seemed to imply that we have suddenly become a supremely confident people. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, flying in from Patna in a specially chartered plane organised by a friend, has called on India to disarm unilaterally and set an example to a world threatened by nuclear annihilation. The Prime Minister, thinking aloud as is his habit, has spoken as if Sino-Indian border troubles are about to be resolved. And, finally, even TTK has promised to go arm-in-arm with Morarji Desai to London to discuss sterling balances, foreign exchange, the common market and such things.

There are other pointers too which have encouraged even the habitually cautious to ride this wave of optimism. We appear to have received some sort of assurance from this USA and the UK that we are to be spared embarrassment over the Kashmir problem — the bullying of Krishna Menon in New York notwithstanding. In return, apparently the Prime Minister has been only too willing to consider a near compromise proposal over the MIG business brought to him by Duncan Sandys, the visiting spokesman of the British Government — somewhat different from the public statement made. India, it is suggested, should purchase supersonic fighters, from the USSR, the UK and the USA. test them out under varying conditions for a year, and then decide which plane should be manufactured in this country.

Supersonics from Both Blocks!

The US Ambassador has returned to Delhi and is expected to approve. In the meantime, the Soviet Ambassador has left for Moscow. Indeed, it looks very much as if we are about to organise impartial, non-aligned competitions for the outdated equipment of both blot's — an amusing variation on Dr. Rajendra Prasad's unilateral disarmament theme!

Meanwhile, the talks Duncan Sandys has been conducting with

the Prime Minister and leading members of the Cabinet have relaxed the noticeable tension in official circles over the foreign exchange position. It is difficult to obtain a coherent account of what Duncan Sandys had to say. Nor do we know what K B Lal, our man in Brussels, actually feels about the future prospects of Indian trade in Europe. A number of persons in high position are now insisting that the Finance Minister need not have panicked, that the aid is bound to come. This is the view held by numerous IS experts in India, who, of course, add that nothing should be done to complicate for President Kennedy the whole business of getting the aid. Not unintelligent Britishers even go to the extent of suggesting that their country will enter the Common Market to wreck it *and* so prevent the emergence of a Germanic Europe, that the Commonwealth and its economic tie-ups will not be destroyed. This cocktail of opinions has obviously had the effect of soothing tired mind?— and taut nerves.

Possibly the monsoon too affects the mood. The rains have come on time. Bumper crop,- are expected. Already there is a glut of jute. And a good monsoon might even help the stock market to get over its blues.

The Pack of 52

If there are waves of optimism in the capital, there are currents of pessimism too. Not without reason, many have come to despair over the Prime Minister's antics over the question of deputy leadership. He has now reduced the contest to a struggle between nonentities in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Two deputies will complete the pack of 52 — with, of course, the joker!

The Prime Minister's sustained effort to waive aside the importance of appointing a Deputy Prime Minister holding cabinet rank and enjoying the confidence of the party reached a minor climax at his last week's press conference. He declared that Gandhi never nominated an 'heir', although everyone present

knew that this was not true. Gandhi had made it quite clear that Jawaharlal would lead the people after him, Jawaharlal whom he did not quite understand but who was undoubtedly India's tomorrow. We may be more sophisticated now and do not like to be reminded of such things, particularly if it means appointing a deputy who might steal some, at least, of the limelight.

True, there are dements in the Congress Party who, Mughal-like, would have Nehru nominate his successor as deputy leader. This may turn the stomach of the genuine democrat. But why should the Prime Minister, who has consciously concentrated so much power in his own hands, deny the need of a straight and open contest for deputy leadership? In all advanced States, both in the capitalist and socialist worlds, the people do have some idea of who is going to *survive* whom. Why should the Indian people be deprived of this comforting thought?

No One Group

More than ever before, the feeling prevails that the Prime Minister is determined to prevent the consolidation of any one ideological group in the Congress Party. He is convinced that any such consolidation would lead to the break up of the organisation. This prevents him from countenancing talk of a single, powerful deputy who would invariably come to be regarded as his heir. Yet, at the same time, the refusal to give a clear direction to the party is doing grave damage to the energy, efficiency and efficacy of the government.

These problems would not arise if there were men in the Congress Party who had the political guts to *frtate* these unpalatable truths in the presence of the Prime Minister. Almost without exception, the leaders of the party are more concerned with expressing opinions which the Prime Minister shares or is likely to accept than with stating what they really believe. Hence the extraordinary spectacle in Delhi of so many leading policy makers

resigned to the familiar 'double think'. The pity of it is that the Prime Minister prefers this obviously unhealthy state of affairs and discourages open controversy and debate.

Even as Delhi reveals its mercurial moods. Parliament prepares to recess. It has been an exhausting session with new talent still to find its way to the top. It will be expected that the Prime Minister

will be persuaded to take a long holiday in July. Perhaps, then, some quiet retreat will enable him to cogitate upon the steps required to give his government a certain degree of the old dynamism-