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Implications of Bhubaneshwar

THE impact of the Congress party on the policies of its Governments in the Centre and in the States has not been particularly marked in the past. This explains the cynicism with which the high-sounding resolutions passed at each succeeding Congress session have been greeted. In general, leaders of the organisation outside the Government have refused to be bothered with official policies and programmes; their attention and efforts have been focused on other matters. Is it possible to notice a change in this pattern? It is too early to say, but the report of the Dhebar Committee is an attempt to spell out the implications, for Government policy, of the resolution on Democracy and Socialism adopted at Bhubaneshwar.

Concentration of economic power in the hands of a small number of business groups was an important issue at Bhubaneshwar and President-elect Kamaraj had called for a commission to check the consequences of such concentration — a suggestion which has been accepted and implemented by the Government. The Dhebar Committee has now recommended that the Government should take a decision "not to issue any licences for new projects to existing large industrial concentrations". It is not prepared to accept as decisive the objection that entrepreneurial ability and finance are scarce — and rightly, considering the highly favourable conditions for industrial enterprise and the very substantial financial and other assistance available from official and semi-official agencies.

Increasing the proportion of the means of production under public control is the Committee's other recommendation to curb concentration. While the broad allocation of spheres between the two sectors laid down in the Industrial Policy Resolution is considered adequate for this purpose, the Committee suggests that when there is undue delay in the execution of a private sector project, it should be taken into the public sector. The report is silent on nationalisation of existing enterprises, though the criteria recommended for extending the public sector into new fields could very well be applied to nationalise industries which contribute disproportionately to the existing concentration of economic power or those which are run inefficiently by the private sector.

The other, and perhaps more important, objective embodied in the Bhubaneshwar resolution was that the essential requirements of food, clothing, housing, education and health of every man, woman and child in the country should be satisfied by a target date, the end of the Fifth Five-Year Plan. A similar target of a minimum income of Rs 100 per month for a family of five by 1975-76 has also been suggested by the Planning Commission. The achievement, of this objective has less to do with the distribution of investment between the public and private sectors than with the pattern of investment. Neither an impressive growth rate nor a high investment target will necessarily suffice. The investment should go into areas where incomes are at present, below the projected national minimum — principally, the rural sector. And within this sector, agriculture has necessarily to be the focus of developmental effort.

The Dhebar Committee attaches the highest priority to the completion of programmes of land reform and to the fulfilment of the agricultural production targets set for the Third Plan. The Committee has suggested that