

Foreigners, the Only Experts

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WHEN persons who cannot be accused of holding dogmatic communist viewpoints begin to warn the country against the growing tendency to rely on foreign capital, foreign aid and foreign experts to solve our problems, it is time to take a long and searching look at ourselves in this eighteenth year of freedom. The analysis of the malady, as presented by widely differing persons such as banker and businessman G L Mehta, the cautious politician Vijayalakshmi Pandit and the impatient Cabinet Minister M C Chagla, is essentially the same. We are fast losing confidence in ourselves and might soon lose the capacity to defend our fundamental interests if this flirtation-turned-infatuation leads to a surrender.

There was a time when some of the more perceptive members of the academic profession used to describe the foreign intellectual visiting India as a kind of well-organised human computer. This foreign intellectual, backed by adequate funds, would select a theme for investigation and do an intensive tour of the country meeting all and sundry who had done some thinking on the subject. This research would be card-indexed together with solid documentation provided by a battery of research assistants, also financed from the funds available to the foreign intellectual.

This job 'on location', would be completed within one to two years. A year would be reserved for producing a book. The book would then become the bible of the local gentlemen whose brains had been picked — and the author would be elevated to the rank of an 'expert', a minor *guru*.

When this story was repeated in its many interesting permutations and combinations, the more cynical used to exclaim: 'And that's how it came to be that all the experts on India are foreign!'. Perhaps, this irony and cynicism have had something to do with the popular concept, particularly in circles close to Congress policy-making, that these 'experts', are the only experts. Now the detached visitor from abroad is shocked by a fact which we seldom seem to notice — that very often in an important branch of government the only really brilliant men working on problems are the Indians *under* the foreign expert, and

even they do not see the absurdity of their plight

The New Climate

The psychological climate is no longer what it used to be. There was a time when leading politicians were dubbed 'Shri PL 420' because they called for too much reliance on U S PL 480 supplies. Now, the USIS can issue pamphlets which speak of such supplies as "food for freedom" without the slightest danger of a snub. Just over a year ago. Prime Minister Nehru could reject the US-sponsored Bokaro project because unfair, disadvantageous turn-key provisions were sought and there was a refusal to accept Indian consultants on the designing and engineering of the project. Now, we encourage the Soviet Union to insist on a turn-key arrangement over which we have practically no control, and we mobilise our bureaucrats to lobby the press and public with the view that no control means efficiency! So it is in agricultural planning, in the defence set-up and even in home affairs where FBI experts were recently called in.

Indeed, the current joke about our overworked hotels is that they are permanently booked by regiments of foreign experts who are here to guide us on everything from organising manure pits to manufacturing jet engines. From the looks of it, during the past eighteen years we have become more incompetent, less able to handle our affairs. And when T T Krishnamachari's appeal to foreign capital to enter the Indian market massively gets under way, we'll probably have to coin another phrase to describe the experts. These days, with bated breath, we study the impression that our leaders make on visiting teams of financiers, potential collaborators, investors and aid-givers. We are made to think that the future of this sub-continent depends crucially on these goings-on.

In many ways we are back almost to 1947. Arguments usually start from ground-floor. Concepts which we had debated threadbare and settled are again being scrutinised by the ruling elite. Is foreign capital such a bad thing? Does it really subvert a nation's sovereignty? Would it not be

better to obtain foreign private equity investment rather than foreign loans which have to be repaid? Is the drain in the form of dividends and what-not, all that damaging? Can we really handle all these projects on our own or with limited collaboration? Have we not become victims of our own dogmas? Look at Europe. Look at Japan. That is the path to follow. Socialism has been discredited. It does not suit the Indian genius.

In other words, the *importance* of foreign collaboration is stressed, not its *need* in special cases. Statistics about these collaborations are widely publicised. Since the exchange crisis of 1957 to September 1964, 2,015 collaboration agreements were approved by the GOI. A country-wise analysis shows the United Kingdom with 574 collaborations, the USA with 337, West Germany with 294, Japan with 161, Switzerland with 90, France with 71 and Italy with 56. If these figures are criticised as suggesting too westward a leaning, it is pointed out that during the same period East Germany has concluded 44 agreements, Czechoslovakia 13, Poland 13, Hungary 7 and Yugoslavia 6. And so, presumably, we remain 'non-aligned' irrespective of the capital involved in these agreements, the nature of repayment or the structure of control.

Forgotten — or almost so — in all this discussion and debate are many relevant issues: that increasingly India's internal effort to mobilise resources and expertise to the maximum is flagging, that foreign capital intake should be only in those vital sectors where the indigenous effort cannot achieve the targets set, that wherever possible we must be in full control of the pricing of plant and ensure the most effective design and engineering, and that at no stage should we permit an imbalance to grow because of pressure from *entrepreneurs* interested only in easy and secure profit. Flabby leadership has destroyed the public's confidence that the essential perspectives of our planned development will be preserved. In such a situation, it is generally felt that foreign capital and expertise can become a dominant voice in the conduct of our affairs.

Politically, our present state creates the despair and demoralisation which

make us apathetic when confronted by determined lobbyists. The ruling party is fast losing its self-reliance, and the convictions which linked it with the people. The party is controlled by the manipulation of powerful organisers. But, significantly, it remains the only viable all India force capable of wielding power. There is no alternative — or, at least, no visible alternative. Until this alternative is forged, the present drift will continue. This has at last been recognised generally in

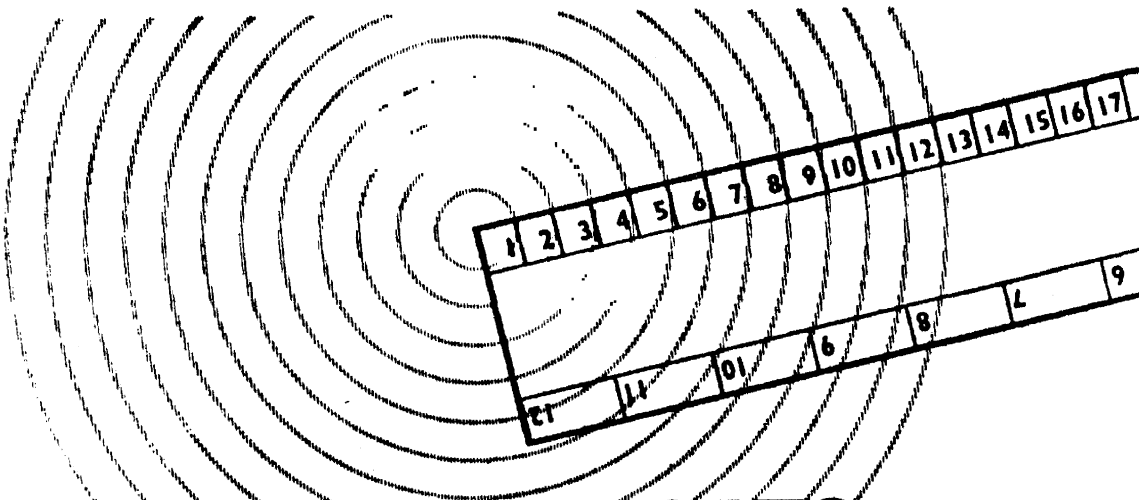
Parliament and in the press,

Will the pressures build within the ruling party for a change in the leadership? Is there a potential leadership which can halt the drift and restore the perspectives? Must we plod along until the general elections in 1967, hoping that they will throw up an answer? These are some of the major questions which form as we try to make sense of the bedlam which prevails in Parliament, as we follow the mysteries of the hunt for Kairon's

killers, as we speculate on who in government leaked the CBI Report on Patnaik's activities in Orissa, and as we marvel over the continuing confusion at government level on the language controversy.

Meanwhile, a subdued Holi festival has been ordered by the powers that be in homage to the memory of Jawaharlal Nehru. If only in remembering him they were to recall something of the passion which inspired him ...

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