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accepted without reservations. Before the elections, the Socialists repeatedly proclaimed that they alone, and not Congress, could save the country from Communism. They reminded the electorate that there were reasons why they seceded from Congress alter independence. They implied that the formation of the Praja Party by Congress "rebels", led by Acharya Kripalani, indicated the way (Congress was going. They described Congress as a Party of the Right. Pandit Nehru had the political sense to realise that this challenge to Congress had to be met to ensure its success in the elections. In his election speeches he emphasised that Congress was fighting the elections on the issue of the Five Year Plan. He graciously acknowledged the principles of Socialism. But he pleaded with the electorate that by voting Congress it would be supporting a Party whose policy incorporates the essence of Socialism.

Subsequent events have proved how right Pandit Nehru was in emphasising this aspect of Congress. It is no exaggeration to say that in voting Congress, the people voted for Pandit Nehru. They had the conviction that Pandit Nehru would not let the people and the country down. They were assured that, under Pandit Nehru's leadership, Congress would be prompt in implementing the Plan. They were impressed with Pandit Nehru's arguments that Congress alone had the machinery and the organisation to execute a bold economic plan; that, the Socialists were doctrinaire and lacked administrative experience; that, he would exert his influence to force Congress to fulfil its election pledges if returned to power. The people had, and have, faith in Pandit Nehru's honesty and integrity. They gave him the opportunity he demanded. But they left no room for doubt that they were prepared to give only a conditional mandate to Congress.

This is the wider political background against which the merger between the Socialists and the Praja Party has to be assessed. There are structural reasons for the fusion between these two parties. Immediately before and during the elections, the widespread dissatisfaction with Congress was reflected in the formation of many splinter groups. To a large extent the splitting of votes helped Congress. The Socialists won few seats in the elections for Parliament, as well as for State

Assemblies. But they polled a considerable number of votes. With the exception of the Communists, all the other political parties experienced the same fate as the Socialists in the elections. On second thoughts, they realised that Congress had been voted back to power on a minority vote. They also discovered that the election successes of the Communists were mainly due to their superior tactics in concentrating their efforts in a comparatively few constituencies. And the Socialists did not miss the advantages that the Communists enjoyed in the southern States through their skilful alliances with the local, splinter groups.

Belatedly, the Socialists began rectifying their electoral mistakes. Immediately after the elections they formed a parliamentary alliance with the Praja Party. With the exception of Madras, where the Praja Party co-operated with the Communists to form the Opposition, these two parties combined to form a single Opposition bloc in Parliament as well as in State Assemblies. Their merger to form the Praja Socialist Party is a logical sequel to their parliamentary alliance. Common political ties bind the Socialists and the Praja Party. Through experience each has realised that it may be difficult for either to oust Congress from power, but both can combine to form a formidable rival to Congress. If the elections demonstrated India's democratic inclinations, post-election developments, culminating in the merger of the Socialists and the Praja Party, underline the Republic's endeavours to establish a party system of government. Such a government can function only when there are two strong political parties in opposition to each other, so that the people can have a free choice between the two possible alternative governments.

Even if the merger of the two political parties has no wider significance, it will be welcomed as an attempt to lay the secure foundation of a party system of government. More interesting it is to speculate whether the experiment towards a party system of government will be carried on with the merged Praja Socialist Party and the Communists as rivals, or, as the elections seemed to indicate, with Congress and the Communists as the rival organisations. It is inevitable that the light must be between Left and Further Left. This does not necessarily mean that the Communists must inevitably be one of the rival parties. India shows no indication of going the way of China. Developments since the elections suggest that the Communist influence can be exaggerated, and has certainly not grown since the elections. The Praja Socialist Party has all the characteristics and attributes for being labelled a Party of Further Left. But can Congress be described as a Party of the Left? Many have their doubts and misgivings about Congress. Its approach to economic planning is far from Left. Pandit Nehru has more than once warned that if Congress does not go ahead, something else will move ahead. Those who cherish social democracy will hope that the fight between the Left and Further Left will be between Congress and the Praja Socialist Party. There are some who feel that Communism may not thrive in the soil and socio-political climate of India. Before the next elections the pattern of the political parties will be more distinct. But if the light is to be between Congress and the Praja Socialist Party, the former will have to move further to the Left, and the latter will have to develop a strong, organised and disciplined party machinery.

Coal Conservation

THE broad facts of the coal industry are well known. There has been an increase in production and a phenomenal rise in exports but internal demand is not still being fully met because of the inadequacy of wagons. Transport still remains a problem, despite significant improvement in this direction also. Supply of wagons, however, has not been able to keep pace with coal production. Further improvement in wagon supply may

take time. *Prima facie* there would seem little point in stepping up coal production, merely to pile up stocks at the pithead.

Conservation of metallurgical coal has engaged the attention of several committees with which the coal industry has been favoured. There has been, until recently, a general consensus of opinion in favour of conserving reserves of good quality coking coal. There are now, however, differences about

what conservation should mean with the chairman of the Indian Mining Association emphatically declaring himself at the last annual meeting of the association against a general policy of reduction of output of metallurgical coal but favouring a policy of using it to the best advantage and extracting it with the least possible wastage.

Conservation of coal, it has now been decided, should take the form of a gradual reduction of output. The Government of India, accepting the recommendations of the Coal Board, have laid a programme, according to which the output of Selected grades A and B coal will have a ceiling of 9 million tons for 1952, 8 million in 1953, 7 million in 1954, 6 million in 1955 and 5.5 million in 1956. This ceiling compares with the current needs for metallurgical purposes placed at 4 million tons. Within these upper limits of production, the Coal Board has been given the discretion to fix targets for individual coal mines, subject to the conditions that. (1) There should be no excessive retrenchment of labour; and (2) The target fixed will not render the working of the coal mines uneconomical.

Other suggestions of the Coal Board accepted by the Government show that they are also anxious to introduce an element of flexibility in the scheme by regulating the production of Selected grades to wagon supply. The 'captive' and government collieries have been brought within the ambit of the ceiling regulation to meet the argument that any attempt at conservation of metallurgical coal would be frustrated by increased raisings in these collieries. Each colliery will be given a wagon despatch target; beyond which no further supply of wagons will be made to it. Collieries under the same management will be treated as one group, quotas being transferable from one colliery to another of the same group, so long as the total output does not exceed the group total target. Colliery owners have been permitted to increase their production of lower grades of coking coal, if they think it necessary to absorb any labour surplus arising out of the pegging of the production of Selected A and B grades. As a general rule, all

attempts "to downgrade selected grades" to defeat the purpose of pegging, it has been reported, will be "deprecated," whatever it may mean. But where such 'downgrading' is permitted, the total output will not be allowed to exceed the targets for Selected grades. The excess of coking coal, after meeting the demand for metallurgical purposes, will be permitted to be distributed to other industries but grade wise limitations will apply.

There have been complaints that, in the absence of a definite policy, arbitrary executive measures were being taken to restrict the use of metallurgical coal with the result that producers were suffering. The constitution of the Coal Board by an Ordinance promulgated early this year, which was later replaced by an Act rushed through the Parliament, has also been the subject of much adverse criticism. The repeal of the Coal Mines Safety (Stowing) Act of 1939 has also been disliked. The only support for the Coal Board is the recommendation of the Planning Commission for setting up a body "which will examine all questions relating to coal from a comprehensive point of view and make recommendations to the ministries concerned and thus assist in the evolution and execution of a co-ordinated policy." The Planning Commission also submitted separately to the Government a 'comprehensive' plan for coal.

In its draft report, a six point programme was outlined as follows:

(1) Coking coal output may be maintained at existing level, but new fields should not be allowed to be opened. Closure of existing mines was not recommended;

(2) Enforcement of stowing, blending and washing will lead to reduction in output of coking coal;

(3) Selective mining should be stopped effectively;

(4) The expansion of steel works and the proposed new pig iron plant will increase essential demand for coking coal by 1.2 million tons in the final three years of the Plan;

(5) Replacement of coking by other coal is recommended, first by replacement of Selected A and B grades in the railways and for other purposes by non-metallurgical coal and then replacement of Grade I and 2 coking and semi-coking

coal by other coal; and

(6) The excess of coking coal output over the needs of the iron and steel industry and for coking should be used for export to earn foreign exchange.

Reduction of the output of coking coal by statute or otherwise was not contemplated by the Planning Commission. The Working Party for the coal industry stated in its report that it agreed with the 'Coal Plan' of the Planning Commission and recommended restrictions on the use of the metallurgical coal in the railways and for other non-essential purposes. But it also pointed out the inconsistency in the Planning Commission's report in that it recommended replacement of coking by non-coking coal and yet wanted the maintenance of coking coal output at the existing level. The Working Party was for reduction of output and emphasised that in deciding the percentage cut, "the average production of the last 5 years should be taken into account as any cut imposed on figures of 1930 or 1951 may, instead of making a cut, put the raisings at a higher level than what the Metallurgical Coal Conservation Committee emphasised."

Enough has been said to raise doubt about the wisdom of conservation of metallurgical coal through output curtailment. The estimates of reserves of good quality metallurgical coal accepted by the Metallurgical Coal Conservation Committee are regarded by a large section of the trade as unduly conservative and leading to unwarranted pessimistic conclusions. In support of an argument against statutory reduction of output of metallurgical coal, featured in a recent issue of the quarterly bulletin issued by the Fuel Research Institute, is the comparatively low volume of current production. Production of selected grade coal being about 8 million tons a year, half of which was being used for the essential purpose of coking, conservation of the other half by reduction of output would save a tonnage of 40 million tons in ten years. But within these ten years, demand for coking coal would certainly increase to the existing level of production and it would then be difficult to reopen the mines which had been closed.