

A Sterile Aberration

Europe to permit a steady increase in their imports of products like textiles from the developing countries, the British Government, like the Governments of other European nations, has found it impossible to resist the pressure put on it by the decaying domestic textile industry.

From the standpoint of Indian textile exports, it is not the general attitude that prevails in this regard but the concrete expression that is given to it in specific import policies that is important. In this connection, the terms and conditions on which Britain enters the European Common Market assume special importance. Shri Neville Wadia was therefore, right in drawing attention to the serious effect that Britain's entry into the Common Market might have on India's textile exports to the U K. It is well known that Britain accounts for a substantial proportion of India's textile exports and any significant fall in Indian exports to the U K would be a very serious matter. Everything depends upon the terms and conditions on which Britain's entry into the Common Market is effected. These are a matter for negotiation between Britain and the present members of the Common Market. What importance is to be attached to the assurance that Mr Macmillan has given that the interests of the Commonwealth countries will be adequately safeguarded, it is difficult to say. It is clear, however, that the particular problem of the "voluntary" import quotas for Indian textile exports to the United Kingdom merges into the wider question of the extent of freedom that the developed countries will permit to the developing countries with regard to their exports of those goods in which they have a relative advantage. Tackled on that plane, it may be possible not only to get adequate safeguards for Indian textile exports to the U K, when Britain joins the European Common Market, but also to bring about a more liberal attitude on the part of the present members of the Common Market to the general question of imports from the developing countries as a whole.

THE ten-year rule, lending itself, as it did, to a variety of convenient interpretations, has met with its greatest setback in the very State where it was sought to be pursued with the utmost vigour. The final selection of candidates by the Gujarat Election Committee, barring a few insignificant instances, has had little to do with the much-discussed rule. Whether the zeal with which the rule was tried to be applied earlier was due to partisan feelings or to higher considerations, it has done no more than to create unnecessary misunderstanding and suspicion all round and weaken out of the few Congress legislature parties in the country which could claim to be united and stable. The party in Gujarat cannot be the same as it was before, for dissensions once provoked cannot be easily abated, and it would be difficult to satisfy the ambitions that might have been roused by the prospect of some senior men retiring from the legislative field. Those enjoying the higher positions of power and authority are back in the picture after a brief period of uncertainty, and the show will go on in the accustomed manner though perhaps without that assurance of harmony and strength which had marked the State Government so far.

The blame for this must go to the rule if it can be called a rule at all. What was just a piece of loud thinking on the part of the Congress President, a casual suggestion, tame to be invested, for some reason or other, with an importance that was fairly staggering at one stage. The idea behind it was quite commendable. It was to replace members; who had been in office too long, by new men, to give a chance to 'new blood' as the terminology goes. But obviously that was not to be done at the cost of administrative talent and experience, which are none too plentiful in the country. All the same, the suggestion as it was sought to be given effect to, seemed to be directed whether by design or accident against the efficiency and stability the Congress regime of the new State of Gujarat had been able to

achieve through the abler and more seasoned men in the party. Not that the intention of anyone could have been to weaken the party as such or the administration of the future; but any hasty action on the line proposed would have had more or less the same effect if only because of the heart-burning and bitterness it would have left in its wake. All is well that ends well, they say; but the question is whether the controversy in Gujarat has ended so well at all.

This episode has a lesson if Congress leaders are inclined to take lessons at all. The habit of woolly thinking and loose talking could advantageously be given up particularly when such vague declarations of pious intentions are liable to be seized upon by others as major policy pronouncements to the embarrassment of many.

Apart from the mischief that such declarations can work, there is the ticklish task of wriggling out of a position taken up or seemingly taken up earlier, with all that it means in terms of needless confusion and misunderstanding and also of reflection on the working of the Congress Party. If the so-called ten year rule was trotted out to test trends of opinion in the rank and file of the organisation or to create any impression on the public mind it has hardly had any useful effect either way.

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