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Commitments Betrayed

PANDITJI has been gone little more than half a year. A year before that, we raised the question in these columns :

"Will India hold together? Will not the constituent Suites of" which the Indian Union is composed tend to fall apart. when the present leadership, under the towering personality of Pandit Nehru . . . comes to be replaced by warring provincial satraps or their puny nominees?" ('Pragmatist', Special Number, July 1963).

Do the changes that have taken place since Pandit Nehru's death confirm or allay our fears? What do they portend?

The change in leadership was smooth and without any outward sign of conflict. Its manner conveyed an assurance of continuity in policy which was affirmed by Panditji's successor as by the Government and the highest organs of the Congress party.

Purposiveness and direction in the conduct of a country's affairs, however, have two aspects. One is the personality at the helm of affairs. Panditji's was unique. He could, as few leaders in any country have been able to do for long, infuse his policies with idealism, vision and a sense of direction. However deep might be the commitment of his successor in office to continuity in policies, elements that derived essentially from Panditji's personality will be replaced by those of his successor.

Policies and the purposes for which they are followed, however, have an independent existence of their own. They can be, and have to be, dissociated from the aura of Nehru's personality which enveloped them in his lifetime. Lal Bahadur Shastri, although no elect of the people, was the best choice in the circumstances and those who were in a position to select Nehru's

successor found him the most acceptable. Those who were primarily responsible for making Shastri the successor came to be called the syndicate. Whether its members still act in concert or not, the label continues to stick. The political interpretation put on Shastri's choice was that of the adoption of the principle of collective leadership. This is, however, a principle which past experience has shown to be unworkable. Even in this short period Shastri has been in office, speculation has been rife about the character of this collective leadership. Has Shastri been free to decide on his own or has he been just a dummy, carrying out the biddings of the syndicate?

The syndicate which had put Lal Bahadur Shastri in power represented, according to the most knowledgeable, the dominant group of the Chief Ministers through their political nominees.