

Instal II.



CHARAN SINGH'S OPPORTUNITY

CS leaves Congress
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--From M.S. Mathur
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Stirrings of a new order are discernible in Mr. Charan Singh's advent to power and the end of the 20-year Congress rule in the State.

Mr. Singh's secession from the Congress and formation of the Jana Congress is a revolt as much against the failure of the leadership to see the signs of the times as against the bossist methods of Mr C.B. Gupta and some of his principal lieutenants who have been living in an ivory tower.

The message of the electorate was clear. It was that the old leadership must go along with their discredited methods which ~~was~~ had made such a mess of things in the State and reduced the party to shambles. Nemesis overtook Mr. Gupta for ignoring this message and he has taken the Congress along with him sooner than many expected.

For long Mr. Charan Singh pleaded with Mr Gupta to heed the writing on the wall. It proved a futile exercise.

Where Gupta Failed

The Cabinet that Mr. Gupta made did not conform to the demands of the times. With a few honourable exceptions, the men whom he took in, had a long past of active factionalism in which they indulged to the exclusion of public duty. Nearly half of them belonged to his own community. Some other appointments he made immediately after assuming office, showed that his mind continued to work in the old grooves.

We have it on good authority that one of his closest and staunchest supporters was provoked to write to him about this, in deep anguish, but failed to make his see the light.

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Mr. Charan Singh's break from Mr Gupta and the Congress came when he found that the Central Congress leadership was powerless to redress his grievances. One of the mediators from Delhi, who had successfully prevailed upon Mr. Charan Singh to withdraw from the leadership election of the State Congress legislature party in favour of Mr. Gupta, was brusquely told off by Mr. Gupta when he tried to mediate a second time. It also touched Mr. Charan Singh on the raw when a statement by Mr. Gupta made him feel that dissidence in the State Congress would no longer be tolerated.

There were other pressures also at work on him. The Samyukta Vidhayak Dal leader, Mr. Ram Chandra Vikal, has been one of his close associates and political disciples. His importunities and those of his other associates in the Congress who felt that the party was now past all redemption, made him take the fateful decision to secede from the parent body and form the Jana Congress.

Few who were watching the events closely were surprised at this development except, perhaps, Mr. Gupta and his immediate circle. For them it was an exercise in calling the bluff that was not. As it turned out, Mr Charan Singh had behind him 17 Congress seceders to begin with. It is quite on the cards that their ranks will swell, further weakening the Congress.

Mr Charan Singh comes to head a government and a party composed of elements so far apart as the Jan Sangh and the Communists with nine groups of intermediate hues in between. To keep them together will tax his patience to the utmost --and he is impatient of cant and hypocrisy and does not suffer sloth and incompetence easily. His great assets are his long and wide experience of nearly all the departments of government as Cabinet minister from 1951 onwards and an awesome reputation for honesty.

More than anything else, he is a son of the soil who has his fingers on the pulse of the people and understands their pangs, their urges and aspirations, their hopes and fears.

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With such a man at the helm of affairs, hopes have naturally been aroused to a pitch never before experienced in the State. That constitutes a danger. If Mr. Charan Singh's team fails to rise to the occasion, it may spell disaster for him and the SVD alike. An adverse factor is Mr Charan Singh's rigidity of mind which, in the motley company in which he is placed, may at times make him uncomfortable and even break him.

Inured to Risks

He has to work out an integrated minimum programme which is practical, feasible and acceptable to all the constituents of the SVD. He had the right idea when he reminded his partymen that they were in the opposition no more and could not afford to indulge in loose talk.

As he put it to them rather bluntly: "You cannot ask in one breath for a reduction in taxes and an increase in expenditure". It will be hard work to contain their exuberance within practical limits. For the present they have promised their unstinted support to him, but this may not necessarily be lasting.

There will be plenty of trouble ahead, but Mr. Charan Singh is inured to the risks involved. He keeps his resignation in his pocket and has brought it out ten times during his long parliamentary career. The first in the series was in March, 1947 when, as Parliamentary Secretary in Pandit Pant's Government he resigned "because a doubt was entertained about, or reflection cast upon, my integrity in releasing in March 1947, an estate known as Ramgarh", from the superintendence of the Court of Wards.

The second time he resigned was on January 20, 1948, when he criticized the Congress policy on the Hindu-Muslim question in a Press statement. The same day he wrote to Pandit Pant saying that if the statement had caused him any embarrassment, his letter should be treated as a letter of resignation.



These two episodes illustrate the kind of man Mr Charan Singh is. That Congressmen who know him too well, will work upon his traits -- and one of them is his intense sensitivity to questions of self-respect--goes without saying.

Third Blow

Mr Charan Singh's defection with 17 of his followers is the third episode of its kind in the long history of groupism in the State Congress which has progressively weakened it and turned it from the instrument of service it was in Mahatma Gandhi's days into an organization in which self-seeking politicians found endless play for their power-grabbling propensities.

The first secession took place in April, 1948 when Acharya Narendra Deva separated from the Congress with 12 MLAs who resigned from the Assembly and formed the original Socialist Party.

Two years later, in January 1950, the second secession occurred when 23 MLAs, including Mr Triloki Singh, Mr. Gopal Narain Saksena, Mr Khushwant Rai and Mr Ganga Sahai Chaube, crossed the floor and formed themselves into what was the first Jana Congress. The issues they raised, were groupism in the Congress and corruption and nepotism in the administration.

A new landmark was reached in groupism when, in August 1958, after intense manoeuvrings, 98 MLA's, including a number of Ministers, expressed on the floor of the House their lack of confidence in the then Chief Minister, Dr. Sampurnanand, but desisted from crossing the floor. The Chief Minister had eventually to submit his resignation in October 1960 when the leader of the rival group, Mr. C.B. Gupta, captured the organization.

Those were the days when the Congress, with its huge majorities, could afford to indulge in groupism and even some defections. Mr Charan Singh's defection at a time when its majority had dwindled into a minority, has dealt it a blow from which it will take time to recover.



The reactions of the people that followed the announcement of Shri C.S. Gupta's exit and Shri Charan Singh's election as leader of SVD, constitute his simple and only justification for the step that he took. There was wild enthusiasm both in towns and villages throughout the vast expanse of this State. People heaved a sigh of relief and felt as if a stone had been lifted away from their chest. They sang and danced with joy. Sweets were distributed. Rickshaw-wallahs plied their vehicles free for a day. At some places, people indulged in Holi, at others in Diwali. There were illuminations even in temples and mosques. The rejoicings at the Independence of the country were tempered by the sad thought that the country had been partitioned. This time it was an un-mixed joy — joy at the end of a period where corruption flourished and no decision was taken on merits whether it concerned men or matters.

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