

(CS-2 + 242)

ECONOMIC POLICY OF JAN CONGRESS

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It is commonly realized that since independence the rich have become richer and the poor poorer. Leaders of the Congress and other political parties have been constantly reiterating it. This realization indicates awareness of the danger inherent in accumulation of wealth. It is common knowledge that money plays leading role in economics and moral regeneration or degeneration of a people. Degeneration is the inevitable result if the power of money is exercised by some self-willed individuals or their corporate bodies. In India, deficit financing has been multiplying the volume of the currency notes. Bulk of this additional money is in the hands of some individuals and their corporate bodies. Contractors and other middlemen have made excessive profits. The Government of India has several times made public statements saying that a huge amount of these profits has not been accounted for. This money is called the black money.

Thus the inflated money can be divided into two parts: (1) that part which has been accounted for, and whose investment is visible; (2) that part whose disposal is not known. In either case it is not the Government that regulates the utilization or disposal. How the money should be spent is decided upon by the privileged individuals. The people or their representatives constituting the Government have no say. It is an extraordinary situation. The inflation was resorted to for public good; but it has been misappropriated by the privileged individuals. This development in Indian economy does not fit in even with the principles of capitalist economy. Of course it is further off from socialism. It is revengefully hostile to the Gandhian principle of trusteeship.

Since Mahatma Gandhi propounded his trusteeship theory the gulf of disparity between the rich and the poor has become wider. At that time three classes were most prominent on the

firmement of wealth, and Mahatma Gandhi made a mention of them in his articles bearing on the subject: (1) the princes, (2) Zamindars, and (3) capitalists in industry and business. The first two have since been abolished, though their power of money has only diminished and has not disappeared. The last class has swollen to a size unheard of in India. This constitutes the main stumbling block in the way of the masses achieving economic freedom.

Mahatma Gandhi developed his own economic philosophy. He saw nothing but misery in the western variety of industrialization of which modern capitalism is the inevitable product. When he was asked whether he was against all machinery, he replied: "What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour not for a fraction of mankind but for all. I want the concentration of wealth not in the hands of a few but in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might. The supreme consideration is man." (M.K. Gandhi: Towards Non-violent socialism p.28).

During British rule, India had been endeavouring to follow the west, particularly Britain, in the pursuit of industrialization. In the history of economic degeneration of India under the British, facts and figures conclusively prove that as the western variety of industrialization grew in volume, unemployment went on swelling - the machines needed fewer men than cottage industries. The result was that the few machine owners grabbed the money which used to go to hundreds of thousands of manual workers. In the execution of

the Five Year Plans, sponsored by the State, the same economic policy was adopted. For example, an earth-lifting machine was preferred to human labour. It presented a sad spectacle around it. As it worked, as if on an exhibition ground, hundreds of villagers - men and women - gathered on the spot to see the miracle. They went back despondently mumbling, "The machine has deprived us of work and bread". The earth-lifting machine is a petty example. Thousands of bigger machine projects have been put into operation as if to ridicule Mahatma Gandhi and condemn the millions to unemployment and destitution.

From this phenomenon, two classes of people have gained. One class resides in foreign countries, mainly the USA and Britain, and the other in India. The former are machine manufacturers and the latter are Indian importers and contractors. Both have been exploiting the masses and amassing wealth. Mahatma Gandhi said: "Real planning consists in the best utilization of the whole man-power of India and the distribution of the raw products of India in her numerous villages." (Haridan, March 23, 1947). The violation of the Mahatma's advice has resulted in India becoming indebted to foreign countries to the tune of thousands of millions of dollars and sterling, and in the rich industrialists and contractors of India becoming richer.

While advocating decentralization of industries in these numerous villages, Mahatma Gandhi also provided for big industrial establishments in his scheme of economy. He said: "At the same time I believe that some key industries are necessary. I do not believe in arm-chair or armed socialism. Hence, without having to enumerate key industries, I would have state ownership where a large number of people have to work together." (Haridan, dated September 1, 1946). On another occasion, he said more lucidly in the usual wording of socialists: "I believe in the nationalization of key and principal industries". (My socialism, p.10).

Mahatma Gandhi's socialism goes further. Unlike socialists of the western variety he does not stop at nationalization of "Key and principal industries". He also concerns himself with the wealth in possession of individuals, which they use for themselves. He puts forth his argument thus: 'Suppose I have come by a fair amount of wealth either by way of legacy or by means of trade and industry, I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me: what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community'. (Harlian, June 3, 1939). He suggests that the possessors should become trustees of the extra wealth and use it for the good of the people. If the sense of social justice does not impel the possessors to become true trustees, Mahatma Gandhi would like them to be dealt with differently: "I would be very happy indeed if the people concerned behaved as trustees; but if they fail, I believe we shall have to deprive them of their possessions through the State with the minimum exercise of violence... (That is why I said at the Round Table Conference that every vested interest must be subjected to scrutiny, and confiscation ordered where necessary with or without compensation as the case demanded.) What I would personally prefer would be not a centralization of power in the hands of the State, but an extension of the sense of trusteeship as in my opinion the violence of private ownership is less injurious than the violence of the State. However, if it is unavoidable, I would support a minimum of state ownership". (The Modern Review, p. 412) Later on (Harlian, dated May 25, 1947), Mahatma Gandhi went to the extent of saying that if the possessors 'do not become trustees of their own accord, force of circumstances will compel the reform unless they court utter destruction'. They 'can hold away only so long as the common people do not realize their own strength'.

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In his definition of economic equality, Mahatma Gandhi dilates on the subject more lucidly: "Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the conflict between capital and labour. It means levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and a levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly as impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land. A violent revolution is a certainty one day unless there is voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good". (Constructive Programme, pp. 21-22 edn.1948).

Mahatma Gandhi hoped that the 'contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labour class nearby cannot last one day in a free India'; but it has already lasted two decades and continues with a hope to last perpetually. That is the sham of our independence. During these decades the rich have, with the inflated money and with the opportunities offered by the rulers, grown vastly richer. There is, however, a redeeming feature; the popular unrest against them has been increasing day after day. The time has arrived for the rich to abdicate their riches voluntarily. The alternative is state intervention if the 'violent revolution' as apprehended by Mahatma Gandhi is to be avoided.

Mahatma Gandhi takes economic equality to the logical end. 'The golden rule to apply', he says, 'is resolutely to refuse to have what millions cannot.' (Young India, June 24, 1926)

'I want to allow no differentiation between the son of a weaver, of an agriculturist and of a schoolmaster'. (Harlian January 15, 1938) In the capitalist or feudal society of today there are as many economic classes as there are grade of income - these are thousands. Advocates of ~~socialism~~ socialism do not think beyond nationalization of big industries. Mahatma Gandhi takes his socialism to the extreme point of equal distribution. 'The real implication of equal distribution' he says, 'is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply his natural needs and no more'. (Harlian, August 26, 1940). Again, to quote him from a subsequent article: 'I cannot hope to bring about economic equality of my conception if I am owner of fifty motor cars or even of ten bighas of land. For that I have to reduce myself to the level of the poorest of the poor. That is what I have been trying to do for the last fifty years or more, and so I claim to be a foremost communist although I make use of cars and other facilities offered to me by the rich.' (Harlian, March 31, 1946).

Thus the Mahatma's theory of trusteeship applies not only to the cases of known capitalists, industrialists and such others, but to every individual who earns more than what he needs, and the amount of need is determined by the common standard of the masses.

Economic grades have been made by man, and as Mahatma Gandhi has suggested, they should be unmade by man. 'In modern language it means the State, i.e. the people.' (Harlian January 2, 1937). The State is there, the people are there; they constitute India. But they have not been able to unmake the man-made inequality, because they have been choosing wrong representatives, and their government ~~has been~~ maintaining the wrong economic status quo.

Mahatma Gandhi admits that all men are not born equal in

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capacity and ability. He discusses this phenomenon and suggests a remedy: 'My idea of society is that while we are born equal, meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is, in the nature of things, impossible. For instance, all cannot have the same height, or colour or degree of intelligence, etc.; there, in the nature of things, some will have ability to earn more and other less. People with talents will have more, and they will utilize their talents for this purpose. If they utilize their talents kindly, they will be performing the work of the State. Such people exist as trustees, on no other terms. I would allow a man of intellect to earn more. I would not cramp his talent. But the bulk of his greater earnings must be used for the good of the State, just as the income of all earning sons of the father go to the common family fund.' Mahatma Gandhi's sense of justice revolted against concentration of economic power whether in the form of industries or any other form. It is a known fact that as the western variety of industrialisation grew in India, the number of the unemployed rose by millions year after year. The spinners and weavers were the first to be affected because the textile mills were the first manifestations of western industrialism. Later on as the years rolled by, one after another cottage industry was destroyed by the intruding machines, and chances of further concentration of wealth thus went on increasing. In this conspiracy of British capitalists and Indian capitalists, the poor millions of India were made miserable creatures. British rulers were periodically posted with the mounting unemployment figures, but they never produced any solution. How could they? They were senior partners in the exploitation. It was Mahatma Gandhi who advocated decentralization of industries and asked Indians to return to the ancient pattern of economy. He would not allow concentration even in the hands of Government. He wanted production and employment to be so arranged that economic equality should be

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a living fact and should not depend on day-to-day Government control.

Therefore, a Jan Congress Government will, broadly speaking charge itself with a three-pronged task: (1) to decentralize the means of production with a view to achieving full employment and undoing concentration of wealth; (2) to nationalize such industries as cannot or should not be decentralized; (3) to take the trusteeship theory to the practical field of life and to set a limit on the spending power of trustees. An idea of how it should be done will be given in the election manifesto of Jan Congress.

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