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WORDS OF WISDOM

The law of diminishing returns holds good in almost every part of our human universe—Aldous Huxley

CHARAN CALLS THE BLUFF

MR CHARAN SINGH is, for the moment anyway, riding high in Uttar Pradesh. He has effectively called the New Congress bluff and followed it up with devastating sarcasm, by terming his critics as "progressive politicians." The New Congress in Uttar Pradesh is today paying the price for its opportunist manoeuvres which, instead of benefiting it, have recoiled in violent fashion. Mr Charan Singh is an astute politician, full of native intelligence and ruthless selfishness, having been nurtured in complete Congress traditions. His clash with Mr Kamlapati Tripathi is not one over ideologies or principles but over exercise of political power. Filled for over a decade in his attempts to become Chief Minister of U.P., Mr Tripathi, after the Congress split, persuaded himself or was persuaded by New Delhi to give unconditional support to the BKD leader. He is today a very disillusioned politician because not only has his own status been ignored by Mr Charan Singh but the New Congress itself is faced with a split.

By asking the New Congress to behave and threatening that in the absence of good conduct on the part of Mr Tripathi, the BKD will not hesitate to "chart its own course," Mr Charan Singh has given ample proof that he is bargaining from a position of strength. The immediate provocation for this threat came from Mr Tripathi's condemnation of three specific acts by the U.P. coalition Government—promulgation of the Preventive Detention Ordinance to deal with the land grab agitation, making optional the membership of student unions and postponement of the takeover of the sugar industry by one of the Government's factories.

It is now up to Mr Tripathi, who has pedalled his way to the precipice, either to take the plunge or to withdraw from the brink. In either case he will be the loser. The New Congress Ministers have already declared that they stand by the Cabinet decisions. If Mr Tripathi forces a showdown, his colleagues in the Government will stick to office, leaving him high and dry. In any case, the Old Congress, which was let down very badly by Mr Charan Singh at one stage, is always there to help him out. So also the BSP and the Jan Sangh who were at one time Mr Charan Singh's allies and who will even now, just to do the New Congress in the eye, extend their support to the BKD leader. Which all only go to prove that more than one man can play this dirty political game without any scruples for honesty, conscience or principle. Mr Kamlapati Tripathi may be full of the winter of discontent, but the New Congress has now to pay the full penalty of subversion the result of a strategy that failed. Otherwise, Uttar Pradesh, the Prime Minister's home State, will be lost to the New Congress. It of course follows that Mr Tripathi may not have the final voice in the matter.

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Think it over...

A politician is like quicksilver, if you try to put your anger on him, you will find nothing under it.

— AUSTIN O'MALLEY

Talking from weakness

THE New Congress in Uttar Pradesh is beginning to look ridiculous in the eyes of the public. The organisational wing of the party and a number of Congress legislators in the State Assembly have been threatening to break up the coalition with the Bharatiya Kranti Dal. The threat was supposed to be carried out when the New Congress MLAs, MLCs and MPs met in Lucknow last Saturday. In the event, no one was particularly surprised that Saturday's meeting decided to continue the coalition in spite of the party's bitter complaints against Mr Charan Singh and the BKD. Not content with making one empty threat, Mr Kamalapati Tripathi repeated the performance immediately after the meeting ended. He told newsmen that the New Congress would withdraw its support to the BKD-led coalition Ministry if Chief Minister Charan Singh refused to accept the guidelines which the executive of his Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee intended to prepare on Sunday. But the Sunday meeting exposed the weakness of the New Congress even more fully. It was unable to adopt any clear-cut guidelines either for its own benefit or for the more dubious benefit of Mr Charan Singh and the BKD. The resolution finally adopted on Sunday was characteristically ambiguous, authorising Mr Kamalapati Tripathi to "take necessary steps to ensure the smooth working of the State Government" and implementation of the New Congress Party's policies and programmes. This anticlimax was also to be expected.

The fact of the matter is that even a united New Congress in Uttar Pradesh would not have a strong bargaining position vis-a-vis the BKD. And as things are, it is far

from being united. Indeed, Sunday's meeting showed that the differences between the organisational wing and the ministerial wing of the New Congress are as sharp as the differences between Mr Kamalapati Tripathi and Mr Charan Singh. While a number of decisions taken by the coalition Ministry were denounced at the weekend meetings by Mr Tripathi's followers, Mr Chaturbuj Sharma, the ranking Congressman in Mr Charan Singh's Ministry, defended the decisions stoutly. The exchanges became so sharp that at one stage Mr Sharma said he would resign from the New Congress in protest against the derogatory remarks made against him and other Congress Ministers in the coalition. Lest this should create the impression that he was clinging to office, Mr Sharma said he would also resign from the Ministry. This obviously had a chastening effect on Mr Kamalapati Tripathi who hastened to persuade Mr Sharma to remain both in the coalition Government and in the New Congress Party. The net result was that the weekend meetings which were meant to demonstrate the strength of the New Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh succeeded only in exposing its utter debility.

Mr Kamalapati Tripathi would be well advised to look at the situation realistically. He is simply not in a position to dictate terms to Mr Charan Singh either in the form of "guidelines" or in any other form. Instead of holding out empty threats, he should seek to restore some degree of cordiality between the New Congress and the Bharatiya Kranti Dal. It is only in that atmosphere that his party can hope to exert its due influence as a coalition partner in the Charan Singh Ministry.



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