

visit to Pakistan the trappings of a semi-official mission. The story has been published that JP has been 'briefed' by the Ministry for External Affairs. If this is correct then Rawalpindi will naturally assume that JP has some kind of governmental backing—and we will soon be busy disassociating ourselves from the activities of the conciliators. Diplomatic observers just cannot understand what goes on these days in the Capital,

Perhaps, as soon as Parliament meets we will be able to get an idea of the mind of the Shastri government on many issues. Stormy sessions are expected. Members of Parliament have been nursing a genuine grievance: many feel that there should not have been this long delay in summoning Parliament, that a special session should have been arranged earlier to discuss the crisis facing the country. Now, there is every likelihood that routine matters will intrude upon urgent issues.

What's more, the repercussions of

the judgment of the one-man tribunal in the matter of the parliamentary election from the Gonda constituency in Uttar Pradesh are likely to be far reaching. A tightly controlled net of fraud and corruption has been unearthed concerning the election of the Kanpur industrialist Ram Rattan Gupta. Apart from the effect on UP Congress politics, the demand will rise that steps be taken to ensure against such grave breaches of rules and procedures in future. That the cosy satisfaction over the workings of our election system should be punctured at this juncture, when there is so much despair about corrupt practices, means that unless the strongest action is taken against all those involved in the Gonda scandal the democratic system itself will come into disrepute.

The sooner the GOI acts the better. And in all directions. Only then will we be able to hope that the air will be cleansed of the smell of decay.

(September 2, 1964)

Letter to Editor

The Age of the Commoner

IDO not really know what "ominous symptoms" Shri Baladrnanath Nandy sees in his letter to you, published under the title, "The Age of the Commoner" in your issue of the August 29. Ominous symptoms in columnist Romesh Thapar? Or in *The Economic Weekly*? Or of the times? Judging by his concentration on Thapar one can only assume he sees these symptoms in Thapar. One rather suspects that all he is saying is that Thapar is not as exciting reading for him after Nehru. But how long can we live and enjoy reading eloquent passages in the moving last days of a falling titan? Surely, not for long after the fall? If Thapar cannot continue to unfold "new dimensions" to usher in an egalitarian, humanist society, it is only because we cannot expect every new Prime Minister or Government to provide "stupendous" new productions like Cecil De Mille for columnists to write about.

As a close reader of Thapar I see nothing ominous, nothing as portentous as all that. I see only the possibility and a hope of a transition and an adaptation: the transition from an all-embracing passion for coherence in all things all the time, and an adaptation to the simple idea that life is not coherent but patchy, untidy, given only to

short spells of clarity or vision between long interludes of confusion, of blurring, illogicality. One may also hope for a better appreciation of the mark of the most successful men and the most successful policies, pragmatism, even though at times it may not seem coherent intellectually or ideologically. But for coherent forms let some contend, "what works best is best".

Men wear words like badges, and Romesh Thapar's unmistakable badge has been "coherence". He has demanded coherence in thought and in action in article after article, in subject after subject, the intellect's will-o'-the-wisp in the practical politics of life. Of course, he was disgusted with those other two pet aversions of his, "amorphousness" and "ambivalence" even before Nehru's death but that undeniable passion for coherence saw it only in Nehru's vision of things and was half content to live happily with it even when his strong commonsense told him the reality was an incoherent jumble of practices; a co-existence of all manner of fish, flesh and fowl. Neither before nor after Nehru was he a lover of the common man if he was commonplace; nor of a democracy which fumbled or corrupted; nor of leaders who did not know their minds or had none of their

own. None of this is new or post-Nehru in Thapar.

It may, however, be possible to detect through Thapar's post-Nehru writings an accentuation of the earlier malaise of the intellectual elite when its *prima donna* has gone; when its psychological need for charisma cannot be satisfied; when the loss of an ideological vision, even one tempered with co-existence and secular tolerance, is like the loss of regimental colours: when bold purpose seems to get lost in the meandering ways of pragmatism. When all this happens while little men ride elephantine organisations, neither adorning the howdah nor controlling the elephant, the intellectual elite, of which Thapar is a member, begins the more readily to show signs of despair. They have not the staying power of the less coherent minds which are more accustomed to less clear-cut mental worlds. Since the aristocratic Nehru no longer provides the image sought, Thapar sees around him in Delhi and the States neither Stuart elegance, nor a virile Bevanite democracy, and he demands, Cromwell-like, that the baubles which our parliamentary leaders toy with are taken away. It may be that he is not quite right about many things and wrong about some, but he is absolutely right about one thing; and that is the need for strong and courageous leadership among politicians and bureaucrats, especially in a democracy like ours where time alone solves no major problems. There are too few Indian columnists who say this so well, though Thapar might care to distinguish between different kinds of strengths, tensile and static, not the best of which is Cromwellian.

In conclusion one might ask: what should one expect of a good columnist? Whatever else, one thing certainly; that he has the capacity to stir the public conscience when others lull it, and that he does it with insights and far-sights in the interpretation of contemporary affairs not given the governors or the governed in their day to day preoccupations. He has to record the true pulse of the time, and yet rise above public passion or complacency to touch just those intellectual and emotional chords which make a people give of their best. In so doing he can be diagnostician, but not physician, for that is the job of social organisations, of which government is one. Essentially, he should be the motivator of other motivator'.

A D MODDIE

New Delhi,
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