

Crosscurrents in Tamilnad

THE Tamilnad Congress Committee's conference held recently in Coimbatore presented an interesting study of contrasts. There were the glimmerings of a new vision in the speech of Kamaraj as well as in the resolution on democratic socialism. As a counterpoise there was the thoroughly wooden, bureaucratic and authoritarian approach of the Chief Minister, Bhaktavatsalam. Yet neither the dais nor the audience appeared to notice the sharp difference. There was no opposition, no debate on either of the two attitudes. Undoubtedly, Kamaraj's appeal was far greater but none could be sure as to whether this was due to the legend around him or to the ideas he was propounding. In passing, it can be noted that in Kamaraj the common man, not only in Tamilnad, sees a combination of simplicity and power which is what he desires, above all else, in a politician. Such a combination is rare enough in India to give the Congress President quite a unique status.

The only Congress leader from outside Tamilnad who attended the meeting was Indira Gandhi. And very popular she proved, too. Kamaraj's insistence on her presence stemmed from two closely related considerations. The first was the need to create a sense of continuity, of carrying on the Nehru approach as the true destiny of Congress evolution. The other was the desire to make clear the Tamilnad Congress choice in the present conflict of policies and personalities in which the ruling party is embroiled. Evidently, the Congress President wants to sharply demarcate himself from the 'Vindicate', clique with which he was unfortunately involved in the first months after Nehru's death.

English Must Go Quickly

Kamaraj made a strong appeal for the removal of English. This could be done fairly quickly, and as the first step, at the regional level. He said that he had already spoken to the UPSC about the possibility of speedily introducing Tamil as an exam medium. In the State itself strenuous efforts would have to be made to ensure that those who received their instruction in Tamil would find it profitable to do so; This commonsense and patriotic approach was followed up by a slashing attack on "English lovers" who opposed Hindi on the ground that it was alien, conveniently overlooking that

English was the language of spiritual conquest and even more alien.

The supporters of English, the Congress President said, were the upholders of wealth and privilege. They represented the forces of reaction and of big property who were still a considerable power in the land. These were the forces which also opposed socialism, since through the implementation of this ideal the Congress sought to better the living conditions of the poor and ensure equitable distribution of wealth. If the Congress was to be correctly criticised it should be from the angle that both on the language issue as well as on economic policy it had failed to move swiftly enough to make the common people the real masters of India. He took up Rajaji's challenge and said that the Congress was quite ready to face any combination that the Swatantra leader's hatred for the Congress could bring together. This challenge would not be met by any retreat but by still more vigorous advance towards socialism. In other words, the menace from the right would be met by hewing a left-ward course.

Resolutions, But No Programmes

This encouraging attitude was reflected in the two major resolutions, other than the one on language, passed at the conference. The first was a firmly worded statement of approval of the policy of non-alignment as not only inherent in India's evolution as a free nation but also as her best contribution to ensure a world at peace and rid of colonialism. The other was on democratic socialism. In this resolution the need was emphasised for the public sector undertaking the entire distribution of foodgrains, for the supply of free food, books and dress to students at all levels and for providing free house sites to the landless poor in the rural areas. The resolution also stated that not only the basic industries but also units for the production of essential commodities should be taken up either by the public or cooperative sector. Moving this resolution, Union Food Minister Subramaniam stressed that socialism envisaged equitable distribution of newly-created national wealth. Distribution through private trade could not subserve this process. He added that it would be improper to ask the poor of this country to be years for the improvement in their conditions,

While all this is refreshingly unambiguous, what was totally lacking was any immediate programme of action to concretise the declaration of faith in terms of policy decisions. There are rumours that Kamaraj is moving towards accepting the idea of the nationalisation of banks. But there was nothing in the resolution even to remotely suggest that radical institutional changes were being contemplated. Similarly, the fiscal policies of the Government need to be geared to the goal of equity but the sponsors of the resolution do not appear to have given this matter any thought. The same was the case with land reforms or agricultural income-tax. The emphasis seemed to be on the equitable distribution of newly-created wealth and not on disturbing the highly unjust existing property and income relations,

Wrong Approach

Far more disturbing than this lack of a programme of action was the speech of Bhaktavatsalam. He was concentrating on the language problem. Making hardly any attempt to present a rational and patriotic case, he stated that he had complete lists of all teachers and students who were likely to create trouble again on August 15 on the instructions of the DMK. These people would be severely dealt with and the trouble would be scotched. "We know how to tackle such a situation", he roundly declared in Kamaraj's presence, seemingly oblivious to the fact that the Congress President had publicly criticised the manner in which the administration had "tackled" the anti-Hindi agitation only some months ago.

Relying on police reports and police bullets would be the surest way to ensure a swift rise in the popularity of the DMK-Swatantra-Muslim combine. Not only would it alienate large sections of the people, but it would mean further concentration of power in the hands of the top echelons of the police and administrative services — implacable foes of the push towards equity socialism envisaged in the other resolution. It was a pity but characteristic that no attempt was made, even by implication, by anybody to repudiate this petty man's cussedness.