

Press And The Prime Minister

by S. N. Aiyer

ONE of the issues which the elections in North Bombay, from which Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon, India's Defence Minister and Acharya J. B. Kripalani contested for Parliament, has brought into bold relief is that of the freedom of the Press and expression in the country. The Prime Minister, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru who obviously did not relish even the modest comments of some newspapers in Bombay favouring Acharya Kripalani, started hitting them hard calling them "reactionary" and "capitalist" press. He adopted similar attitude towards those who propagated for the Acharya. Even an eminent leader of the calibre of Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan did not escape his wrath. Although, the Prime Minister did not mention Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan by name, the reference was clear. Likewise many left-leaning Congress leaders and journals called the pro-Kripalani press as "Jute Press" and sometimes had the temerity to suggest that these papers should be nationalised. Not satisfied with all this, some prominent Congress workers, instigated by communists and fellow travellers, staged a bonfire of *Indian Express* and *Loksatta*—two leading dailies of Bombay which favoured Acharya Kripalani and cried hoarse at the entire "capitalist" press. When the organisers of the bonfire took out a procession to the offices of *Indian Express* and the *Loksatta* a Congress M.P. from Kashmir, who led the procession, is reliably reported to have told the General Manager of *Indian Express* group of newspapers that but for the police he would have burnt down their offices. There is strong suspicion that primarily the bonfire idea was inspired by no other person than Mrs. Violet Alva, Union Deputy Minister for Home Affairs. She is stated to have told: "During the days of our freedom struggle we used to boycott the use of foreign textiles and to organise public bonfire of these textiles. In the same way we should organise a bonfire of this English daily (*Indian Express*)."¹ Apart from the audacity of comparing such an action with the boycott and burning of foreign textiles during the fight for independence, the behaviour of the Deputy Union Home Minister betrays an utter lack of sense of official responsibility on her part. In no other country, a minister who in-

cites people to violence and anarchy could have been tolerated. It is true that Mrs. Alva denied that she had made such a statement but the lukewarm fashion in which she denied and the complete absence of a single word of condemnation of the bonfire in her statement gives credence to the report that she had spoken such words.

As a matter of fact, the Prime Minister has been showing increasing sensitiveness to the critics of his government. He regards those who find fault with his policies as dishonest hirelings of the bloated capitalists and as enemies of social change and socialism. This charge deserves a serious answer as the behaviour of the Prime Minister may reflect in the attitude of the ruling party, which ultimately may decide to scuttle the freedom of the press and expression by devious means.

The answer to this charge must begin by lamenting with the Prime Minister the uneven development of the Indian press. What Mr. Nehru generally refers to as the "great" papers are all in the hands of big business though the degree of control the big business wields over the policy of the papers is rather exaggerated. The fact that the "great papers" are owned by big business is, however, unfortunate, since it is natural to expect that all other interests are better represented in nation's press, in other words, every section in the society must be in a position to find expression regarding its own interests. We should have papers such as those of trade unionism, art, science, co-operative movement, agriculture, industry etc.

But it is one thing to deplore the fact that most important papers are owned by big business and quite another to condemn them as reactionary or dishonest or as either incapable or disqualified to judge issues on merit or to reflect public opinion with any degree of fidelity. Mr. Nehru will do well to remember that till recently he had a press in India which was about as dutiful as any outside the communist empire. The reason was not far to seek. First, there was the natural inclination not to judge the performance of the government too harshly in the enormously difficult period of adjustment after independence. Secondly, there was the distaste of big business to run foul of the government. Courage is not a quality that distinguishes, with very few exceptions, the men with large stakes.

The most important inhibitory factor of all was the unchallengeable place in public esteem and the great qualities of the man at the helm of affairs. Mr.

Nehru is, undoubtedly, a man of great charm, of abounding sincerity of purpose and an impeccable sense of integrity. Possibly, there is no parallel in the world's history for anyone in the practice of active politics to attain his eminence and retain it over a period so long without the hint of a compromise involving his personal or public honour.

It is not easy to criticise such a man anywhere. In the conditions of India, where religion, tradition and the social stratification are all on the side of reverence and confirmity it has been a task calling for an act of faith.

This side of idolatry, Mr. Nehru is still a greatly respected and greatly adored figure. There is no doubt about it. But rather, the inevitable result has been that this and his earlier immunity from criticism have blurred for Mr. Nehru the distinction between personal popularity and political judgement. If Mr. Nehru still believes that his great hold on the imagination of the people has much relation with the actions of his government he is sadly out of touch with popular feelings.

Let Mr. Nehru not deceive himself about the inspiration of the criticism against him. There is doubtless hirelings in the press who will serve the petty interests of their masters as there are hirelings in Mr. Nehru's circles who will do his bidding against their better judgement. But on some of the matters where there have been major clashes between his policies and the press, such as Tibet and China and State trading etc., Mr. Nehru is no longer in tune with the public opinion in the country. One wishes he could sometimes overhear, for he will never hear, what many Congressmen and even some of the Congress Ministers will bring themselves to say in congenial company.

Still, that Mr. Nehru has misjudged public opinion is not enough to criticise him. He would not be the leader he is if he did not create it, fashion it and be in its vanguard. But what makes the Prime Minister's attack on the press and public men so unfair is that he significantly modified so many of his policies on which criticism was most vocal.

Take the case of border trouble with China. If it was not for all the noise in the press and from public platform, it is possible that facts may still have been kept away, from the country and some more Indian territory gobbled up by the Chinese without the Indian public knowing anything about it. In relation to China, Mr. Nehru brought us to the brink of national humiliation and the humiliation was contained not in that we ceded ground without doing anything about it but that while it was being ceded the country was allowed to indulge in the pathetic posture of Panchsheeling *Bhaibhainess*.

Even after the facts were published, Mr. Nehru showed a curious tendency to minimise the magnitude of Chinese threat and talked of the land in Peking's occupation as mountain tops which grew nothing and were too cold for habitation. Does he then deplore the temper of the country which press and public men reflected has forced on him a policy of firmness with China?

Or let us watch Mr. Nehru writhe in the agony of his reappraisal of the local communists. Mr. Nehru against all available evidence had hoped to domesticate them to democratic ways and national loyalty. The press and public men warned him repeatedly that this could not be done and Mr. Nehru is now well on the way to accepting the view of his critics. This is obvious from the way he has been criticising the Indian communists.

Tibet provided an instance of Mr. Nehru reluctantly but inexorably catching up with an enraged and mortified public opinion and Mr. Krishna Menon will yet provide us with yet another such instance.

Mr. Nehru's denunciation of his opponent in a manner which reflects typical communist tinge and the bonfire of the newspapers organised by members of his party which is reminiscent of the book-burning orgies of the Nazis under Hitler, make one sit up and think of the pass state of affairs in India may come to unless determinedly checked by the force of public opinion.

It must be clearly pointed out that the opposition to Mr. Krishna Menon's candidature was based on ideological rather than on personal grounds. This basic fact was not realised by Mr. Nehru and he consistently indulged in personal attacks on Mr. Menon's opponents. Although, the statement of Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan favouring Acharya Kripalani was supremely dignified and maintained high-level of political morality, the Prime Minister's reaction to it smacked of intense intolerance and spirit of invective. This was unfortunate, because Prime Minister's attitude in this respect in fact, reflected the degeneracy in the thinking of top Congress leadership and the blind connivance of it by the Congress rank and file.

It is true that Congress will win everywhere and be in a position to form government in every state. This fact, in itself, is not dangerous. But what is dangerous is the intolerance of Congress leaders of public criticism. The only way to bring the top Congress leadership to be responsible to public criticism is to assert it consistently and fearlessly.

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The Art And Science Of Being Neutral

by Melvin J. Lasky

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

—Lewis Carroll

NO text could be more relevant to our own Wonderland world of many tongues and slogans. From every continent have come cries of "peace" and "freedom", and no two definitions are exactly alike. In Belgrade recently there was a new concert of nations devoted to the principles of "neutrality"—but for some this meant neutralism, for others only "positive neutralism", for still others simple "non-alignment". The question of a master meaning remains unanswered. Each statesman (and his speech-writer), in an exercise of intellectual sovereignty, chooses his own usage of words—a kind of self-determination of notions. It is rarely that this goes beyond verbal jugglery. The real question is, I suppose, not which word is to be master, but what are, in truth, the overmastering realities.

Consider, for example, the relationship of the U.S.A. to the concept of neutrality. In recent decades the American attitude has been one ranging from critical to hostile. For a Secretary of State like the late John Foster Dulles it was almost incomprehensible that men or nations would want to stand aside from a mortal struggle in which a good cause was locked. Yet for well over a century it was the new and young nation of Americans which invented the idea of "entangling alliances" as a menace to peace and independence. How short all our memories are! It comes almost as a shock to read a history of the '30s and come upon the words of President Franklin Roosevelt (in 1936, at the time of Hitler's rise in Europe)—"the United States and the rest of the Americas can play but one role: through a well-ordered neutrality to do naught to encourage the contest, through adequate defence to save ourselves from embroilment and attack..."

Several years later (and only six weeks before the outbreak in September 1939 of World War II) Roosevelt's Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, was saying: "Both sides agree that this nation should at all times avoid entangling alliances or involvements with other nations; both sides agree that, in the event of foreign wars, this nation should maintain a status of strict neutrality, and that around the structure of neutrality we should so shape our policies as to keep this country from being drawn into war..." By the time the year 1941 was out, the Americans were at war over two oceans, having been attacked by the Japanese and had war declared upon them by Hitler

in a characteristic fit of irrationality. Their words had been earnest, but realities were overmastering.

Consider another relationship to the concept of neutrality, that of Switzerland. For many observers the Swiss and "the art of being neutral" are almost synonymous. This intelligent, prosperous and peaceful people in the heart of Europe avoided entanglements in both tragic world wars. Yet it is curious how little attention is paid to the lessons of Switzerland's experiences, and as a matter of fact, until just the other day we knew only precious little about recent events. With the appearance of Jon Kimche's study of Swiss neutrality (published in London under the ill-advised and meaningless title of "Spying for Peace"), we have for the first time the drama of Switzerland caught between war and peace as well as some important signposts for our own time and its problems.

For six years, little Switzerland, landlocked around the Alps between Germany, Italy and France, teetered on the verge of catastrophe and destruction. In 1939, after the first military triumphs of Hitler's *Wehrmacht*, she lay there ripe for the plucking. In 1940, after the conquest of France, the encirclement by the dictators was quite complete. Even in 1943 when the tide of war had turned against the Berlin-Rome Axis, the Swiss were in grave danger—wouldn't the Nazis move into Switzerland to preserve their crumbling Italian front? Finally in 1945, when the war was all but over, they were terrified at the prospect of Hitler's using the Bavarian and the Swiss Alps as a desperate last-ditch redoubt. These were dangerous and friendless years. How did they manage to survive? The word was "neutrality"—but what were the realities?

The hero of the story, according to Mr. Kimche's book, is an unknown Swiss General named Henri Guisan. It was he who organized the defences of his country: for six wartime years he continued to go about his job shrewdly and efficiently despite the periodic outbursts of fear among the politicians and panic among the population. He trained his soldiers and maintained their morale (which was depressed and almost shattered when they watched columns of civilians fleeing from the frontier areas). He put his demolition squads into Switzerland's factories, and had his plans in continual readiness for the blowing up of the great Gotthard and Simplon tunnels and all the Alpine passes. As Kimche writes:

"It meant sacrificing decades of costly and difficult engineering works, the pride of Switzerland... Not even the scorched earth decreed by Stalin compared with the cold and calculated plan of self-destruction which Guisan could execute—should it become necessary..."

To be sure, we can never really know how much cold calculation there was to this strategy of deterrence, and how much bluff. How much of neutral

Switzerland's self-confident firmness was simply a bold front? But the boldness worked. "Guisan had sown the seed of doubt in the Fuehrer's mind. It was enough to make him pause, hesitate..." This is, alas, the eternal stuff of power-politics—war, encirclement, aggression, deterrence, bluff, survival. These words and concepts do not change much, nor do the confused and drastic emotions which accompany them.

For Guisan alone was by no means "the voice of Switzerland." In point of fact there were extended periods of a year and two when he was not consulted by his Government. The General went one way, the President another—the soldier resisted, the politician sought compromises. The duel between them in the tiny Swiss arena is fascinating and instructive.

"To be fair, however, to the Federal President it must be said that Pilet Golaz sought the same main objectives as did Guisan. He wanted to safeguard Swiss independence just as much as Guisan did, but Pilet Golaz could see the only hope for doing this in seeking the fullest possible Swiss accommodation to German needs and demands, while Guisan could see hope—and national self-respect—only in a policy of determined resistance to the Germans. Guisan therefore considered every step taken by Pilet Golaz to appease the Germans as one more step on the road to inevitable and total submission; Pilet Golaz, for his part, viewed every new gesture of defiance by Guisan as one more move towards the fatal provocation of the Fuehrer which would lead to the invasion of Switzerland..."

One wonders whether there is a history of any tribe, people, or nation anywhere which does not record this same drama of the classic contest between the two basic political temperaments. The stalwarts stand firm—and the appeasers appease. There are always the "resisters" and the "adjusters", those who believe in the principle of strength (and the strength of principle) and those who feel that the hard and cruel logic of events calls for concessions and compromise. One man's caution is another man's betrayal.

And so indeed did it seem to Guisan when, for example, the Swiss diplomats in Berlin pressed ceaselessly for the elimination of all reports and comment from Swiss newspapers which might upset the Nazi authorities. For him "neutrality was a principle of foreign policy, not of ethics. It presents a programme of foreign relations, not a moral idea." The problem had always plagued the "neutral men" in Swiss public affairs. "Does neutrality not lead to a deadening of moral feeling? Does it not, when consistently maintained, end in the abominable condition of a resigned and cowardly indifference?" The answer, as they resolved it, was that neutrality was solely a matter for the state, not for the private individual.

Words again, noble words if you wish, but often difficult to live up to in times of trouble. President Golaz thought it necessary and proper to release interned German aircrews, to lift the ban on Nazi newspapers entering the country, to discuss with Nazi Minister Funk measures for economic collaboration, to suspend the court-martial of some of Hitler's

saboteurs caught in the act of trying to blow up military air-fields, and even to make the effort to be nice to local Nazi agitators. Could all this truly help to strengthen the chances of survival? If the powerful and aggressive enemy was deterred by a sneaking respect for pluck and determination, would not weak-willed trimming stimulate only contempt?

Our story has a fortunate end, and its causes and consequences are—at least for the historian of Swiss neutrality—clear. As Kimche writes:

"...For Guisan understood more than ever at the end of this murderous war why Switzerland had remained inviolate, independent and, formally speaking, neutral. It was not the product of the guarantee which the Powers had given her. It was not due to the acceptance by the warring powers of the concept of neutrality, or because the Swiss waved the flag of neutrality on all possible occasions—and on some impossible ones. They had remained free, and at peace, because they had prepared for war, because they had been prepared to fight, and because, above all, they had impressed on every possible attacker that the Swiss would not be defeated except at a price—and the price which Guisan had placed on Swiss independence was greater than even Hitler was prepared to pay.

The Swiss estimate of the consequences of all this for current thinking on the subject of neutrality leads to some very sharp comments on the Babel of slogans to be heard at the U.N. (of which, by the way, the Swiss are not members). There would seem to be a profound difference between making "declarations of neutrality" — and Kimche includes "non-alignment", "neutralism", "positive neutralism", and "non-commitment here — and having a genuine neutral policy. By declaring themselves rhetorically on all the major questions of the world, on all the thorny problems which remain unsettled between the great power-blocs, the new neutralists have become "crusaders for righteous causes."

Bandung, he concludes, "interpreted its neutralism in terms of intervention in world affairs — the exact opposite to the traditional Swiss concept of neutrality... Therefore, the modest lesson which we have learnt from the Swiss General Guisan might be recapitulated with advantage. Neutral activism and intervention was both permissible and necessary in the case of the Swiss because it was essential to the defence and independence of the country. It was not a slogan for crusading for righteous causes... And once this happens neutrality, neutralism, or non-alignment becomes a sham or a political myth."

This is, of course, not the last that will be heard of this debate among the neutrals of the world as they try to define and re-define the word "neutrality" in their struggle for peace, freedom, independence. But perhaps another warning from Lewis Carroll would be apposite:

"That's a great deal to make one word mean," Alice said in a thoughtful tone.

"When I make a word do a lot of work like that," said Humpty Dumpty, "I always pay it extra."

Gresham's Law In Politics

by M. A. Venkata Rao

IT has been a common-place observation in politics from the early days of democracy in ancient Greece that a sort of Gresham's Law operates in politics as well. Just as bad coins and notes drive good ones out of circulation, in democratic and even aristocratic politics, it has been notorious that bad men emerge to occupy places of power while the sensitive, competent men withdraw from the arena.

But like all social laws, this fact is only *tendency* which inclines people to act in a certain way but is not a necessary law like those of objective sciences.

In human psychology, instinctive impulses and first impressions exert much force on conduct and opinion but they can be and are brought under control by further thought and the leadership of the elite capable of deeper reflection.

I am writing before the counting in these February elections. The final results will soon proclaim the condition of democracy in the present grave crisis and its chances for survival in India.

The North Bombay struggle between the Nehru-Menon status quo and the Kripalani challenge to communist influence has been mirrored in most constituencies.

I wish to record here my impression of the condition of democracy today gathered during this strenuous campaign in which I was a candidate for Lok Sabha from Bangalore city as also for the Mysore State Legislative Assembly from Basavangudi constituency, one of the 8 in the city.

Apart from independents, the contest revealed the balance of forces fairly accurately — Congress, Communist, Swatantra and Jana Sangh parties.

The Swatantra and Jana Sangh represent forces opposing the communist influence.

Their combined effort presented a formidable ideological resistance to the Leftist tendencies in general and the communist party in particular.

The educated classes of the middle and lower middle classes drawn from all occupations, particularly self-employed persons and a certain part of the professional classes showed a distinct sense of the danger of communist influence to freedom (and well-being generally).

The Chinese invasion and the attitude of the Reds to it has alienated large elements of the educated and alert part of the electorate.

The Congress has shared in this ill reputation for neglecting the Chinese menace, which it cannot explain away.

In general, it can be said that the people were found to be more conscious of today's issues and of the necessity for a change from Congress rule.

My party (the Jana Sangh) put up a comprehensive and wide-reaching organisation, concentrating on the Basavangudi constituency. House to house visits,

street van loud-speaker propaganda, posters, hand-bills distributed in crowded localities, ladies meetings, street corner orations amplified by mikes and car loud-speakers together with visits of party leaders to influential persons and groups a special effort to break the hold of Congress (money and patronage) on ignorant workers etc. brought to us a vivid impression of the many-sided reactions of different ranks of voters.

The dominating impression that I received, shared by my colleagues (mostly young men between 25 and 35 years of age) was that there was *no difference* between educated and uneducated classes of people in regard to the merits and demerits of democracy as a form of government!

The sceptical and cynical feeling that all politicians are the same, that all men in power will act alike — intent more on feathering their nests and patronising their own kith and kin, neglecting the common good, that money tells and wins in the end to the discomfiture of the poor, that it is no use taking the trouble to vote, that new men will also get corrupt when exercising power in their turn, and so on was common to the educated and ignorant, rich and poor, high and low!

We found this sentiment expressed with force and point, spiced with examples of the corrupt behaviour of politicians within their knowledge, among all ranks!

Many openly expressed the idea that things were much better under the Maharaja and the British before independence.

Women showed more consciousness of the evils of bad government as seen in the rising prices of household necessities particularly food grains and cloth.

In discussing election issues, people showed remarkable shrewdness in estimating the character of candidates. They may not understand the world issues involved in their own affairs but they could size up the merit of candidates as *persons*, whether they were likely to represent the interests of the common people.

The impression was that if political parties maintained contact with the people in their several groups more continuously between elections, their constructive interest could be successfully evoked. Election funds too could be raised more easily from the rank and file in small amounts throughout the intervening period to reach satisfactory magnitudes at election time. The danger of communism is more widely understood today. The impact of Plans and socialism on current price levels has been universally felt. The corruptions of the ruling party have alienated the people to unprecedented lengths.

The sense of crisis (indeed the fear of a possible

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The Plastic Bombers

by Jean Bloch-Michel

The O.A.S. (Secret Army Organisation) plastic bomb outrages that have swept France and Algeria in the last few months have culminated in attacks on the voices of public opinion—publishers, journalists, editors—in an attempt to silence them. Among these attacks was the one carried out last month against the offices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Paris, which, in its publications has repeatedly called for a liberal settlement in Algeria.

EVERY day and every night explosions resound through Paris. These are the blasts of plastic bombs through which the French Fascist groups, who claim they act in the name of "Algérie Française", make their presence felt. It started last year with a bomb at Orly airport which killed a workman, then one at the Gare de Lyon, and then another which killed the Mayor of Evian on the eve of the discussions scheduled there between the French Government and the F.L.N. But these first outrages seem to have been carried out haphazardly (why choose Orly?) and did not have the expected results. Subsequently, the plastic bombers have chosen more carefully—if not their victims, then at least their targets.

For several months now, the terrorists have been singling out all organisations and individuals known to favour a peaceful settlement of the Algerian war. Not only F.L.N. sympathisers, but anyone supporting a negotiated agreement has been the target of their attacks. This includes the Communist Party, of course, all the more so because the O.A.S. (Secret Army Organisation), in attacking the communists, hoped to obtain the sympathy and approval of French public opinion. However, aside from the fact that this is a very questionable kind of anti-communism, it has definitely helped those whom it claimed to be fighting, and the difficulties caused for the French Communist Party by the 22nd Soviet Party Congress have simply disappeared. As could be expected, this terrorism has strengthened the Party's inner cohesion and has attracted to it the fellow-travellers who had been holding back; for the first time in years membership has grown and several by-elections have shown that voters who had turned their backs on the Party have returned to it now that the Fascists are attacking it.

But it is well known that for the Fascists, the word communist can be used to cover a multitude of sins, as Salan and his hired assassins are showing us. The list of plastic bomb victims comes to a very mixed bag indeed. It includes Jean Ferniot, the political commentator of the important daily "France-Soir", as well as other writers on that paper. And a bomb has actually exploded in the paper's offices. The list also includes Françoise Giroud, managing editor of the weekly "L'Express" and—since the killers are not very well-informed—a bomb exploded one day at a former residence of Jean Daniel, one of the "Express" writers who is a specialist in African affairs with a world-wide reputation.

A few days ago three journalists of "Le Monde"—Philippe Herremann, also an expert on Algeria, Jean Planchais, a military affairs commentator, and Jacques Fauvet, the political editor—had their homes bombed, and it is only by a miracle that their families were not hurt. Earlier a bomb planted at André Malraux' home severely wounded a four-year-old little girl who may have been blinded for the rest of her life. Publishers, like Editions de Minuit and François Maspero, magazines, like "Esprit", democratic organisations, like the Congress for Cultural Freedom, have been the victims of similar attacks. Fortunately, the damage done so far has for the most part been only material. Nevertheless, the list of victims grows from day to day. Usually the people who are hurt are entirely accidental victims: a house-porter, a child, a passer-by, a clerk in the Foreign Ministry. . . .

We are bound to wonder where this terrorism is leading. Do the Fascists who are carrying out these acts of terror (under the cover of the Algerian flag which for most of them is only a pretext) really think that the journalists, publishers, and intellectuals who are their targets will fall silent after the first bomb, stop their activity, shut down their presses or go back on their convictions? Certainly not, they cannot possibly believe that. But they do think that in creating insecurity for everyone, in showing that they are capable of anything, even of killing utterly innocent people, they will spread general fear among the inarticulate masses in the hope that they would silence those who are speaking out. Perhaps they also believe that the F.L.N. has only become a party to the negotiations through terrorism, and that the O.A.S., being terrorists also, they will have to be asked to negotiate as well. If the F.L.N. has obtained the support of the Algerian Moslem population by using all possible means—often the worst and least excusable—the O.A.S. has, for its part, taken in hand, "conditioned", the Europeans of Oran and Algiers. But the O.A.S. remains completely isolated in metropolitan France, appealing only to killers and the criminally insane. And the cease-fire, as well as the announcement of the guarantees obtained by the European population of Algeria, may well unravel the bonds linking the inhabitants of Oran and Algiers to the O.A.S.

Should we then conclude that the outrages will stop on both sides of the Mediterranean when the vicious war itself comes to an end? Nothing is less certain.

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Young Somalis' Adventures In Prague

by Fritz Schatten

FOLLOWING the example of several young Africans who recently reported on their experiences in the Soviet Union, six students from Somalia lately turned their backs on Czechoslovakia and gave details at a press conference in Bonn and in interviews in London of the treatment of Africans by the Communist authorities in Prague. Their descriptions, which present an excellent picture of Communist attempts to win over tractable elements in the young elite of South-Saharan Africa, are full of dramatic undertones, for the little group had to overcome an almost incredible degree of resistance before securing permission to leave Czechoslovakia.

With the exception of one of the older students, who had already spent four years in the Eastern Bloc and joined the group at a later stage, the Somalis had arrived in Czechoslovakia only a few months before. Their scholarships had been offered them by Prague via their own government in Mogadishu. None of them had any knowledge of living conditions in their future hosts' country. They had only the vaguest ideas about Communist rule, and the Czech Ambassador to Somalia, who saw them off on their flight, made no reference in his speech to socialism or Communism. There was a similar absence of political talk when they were welcomed in Prague, although they were urged to recognize the 'special assistance' rendered by Czechoslovakia to all colonial and post-colonial peoples.

The unpleasantnesses started when it came to purchasing some urgently needed winter clothing. Although the Somalis had been guaranteed an 'adequate sum' for this item, all they were handed at Prague was 500 kronen, and with clothing prices as high as they were this did not go far. Each of them had to 'borrow' from other grants, with the result that most of them spent their book allowance of 400 kronen on clothes.

While Czech officials left them alone at first, the Somalis had hardly arrived in Prague before they were bombarded with requests from African advocates of Communism to join an unequivocally Communist "Union of Somali Students in the Socialist Camp". Even though the aims of this association were initially disguised, the Somalis soon realised that they were being courted for political ends. When they refused to join, the secretary of the Union, Mohammed Ali-Ahmed, warned them that to persist in their decision might entail "harsh consequences" and argued that their socialist hosts were justified in demanding a 'friendly attitude'.

The adverse consequences of their attitude were not slow to declare themselves. On their arrival at a language institute in the small town of Dobrushka, where they were to spend a year, the Somalis found

themselves treated with suspicion from the outset. At the Institute, which housed an average of 75 students from Africa, Asia and Latin America, every conceivable restriction was placed on their freedom. Letters from home were handed to them opened and telegrams were often retained days before being distributed, likewise opened.

One particularly oppressive feature described by the Somalis was the total lack of objective information. The only newspapers available to them were those published by the Eastern Bloc or the Communist Parties of Western Europe—England, France and Italy. The possession of any publication which had found its way into the Institute without being vetted was the signal for officials to appear and confiscate the dangerous material. A large wireless set in the common-room, which was technically capable of receiving foreign and thus Western broadcasts had been specially doctored so that only "approved" Czechoslovakian programmes could be switched on.

For its language classes, the Dobrushka Institute employed six Czech teachers, two for the Spanish, three for the French, and one for the English-speaking students. The lecturers' linguistic knowledge was completely inadequate.

The Somalis reported that contact with their teacher was so difficult that they made very little progress in the Czech language. Their request to be transferred to another and better institute was rejected by the Principal as 'an unfriendly demonstration'—just as every little infringement of the Institute's disciplinary code was immediately interpreted as a political demonstration against the host country. Finally, the Somalis incurred particular opprobrium by declining to take part 'voluntarily' in introductory courses in Marxism-Leninism. Their argument that they had not come to Czechoslovakia for a political education evoked furious comment.

Outside the Institute, too, the students noticed many forms of restriction and discrimination which were in flagrant contradiction to Communist propaganda. It was impossible to leave the district of Dobrushka without special permission. In evident fear of reprisals by the secret police, Czech citizens avoided establishing contact with the Somalis, as the latter would have wished. Young Czechs virtually avoided them in local restaurants and dance halls.

Finally, the Somalis suffered on account of their religious beliefs. As orthodox Moslems, they were ridiculed for their religious observances and deliberately served with pork even though other sorts of meat were available.

At this juncture, the student Mahdi Ismail had his scholarship cancelled at Prague, where he had arrived four years previously as a convinced Communist. In

his capacity as a representative of the Somali trade unions he had been able to make journeys to other places in the Eastern Bloc, notably Moscow and Peking, and had been carefully sponsored by the Communist authorities ever since his arrival. Having served as interpreter to the President of Somalia during the latter's visit to the Czech capital, he had witnessed the growth of ever closer ties between Communist officials and leading politicians in the Greater Somali League. He knew, for example, that Mukhitdinov, the top Russian official who was a Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union until the 22nd Congress, had handed the Secretary-General of the Greater Somali League the sum of \$50,000. Ismail's difficulties began when he was given an ultimatum to join the above-mentioned "Union of Somali Students in the Socialist Camp" and the Greater Somali League. He was subjected to systematic pressure which culminated in the cancellation of his scholarship, but, curiously enough, he received no exit permits.

In mid-December, 1961, Mahdi Ismail and the five Somalis studying at Dobrushka decided to leave Czechoslovakia together at all costs. Without the approval of the Principal of the Institute, they went to Prague. Finding it impossible, as foreigners lacking the necessary know-how, to obtain a hotel room through the State Tourist Office, they spent the first night and the two following bitterly cold nights in the open, either in parks or huddled in corners in a temperature which sometimes fell to many degrees below zero.

Their efforts to obtain official authorisation for the granting of an exit visa were at first completely unsuccessful. The Somalis were abused in the ugliest terms, both at the so-called 'University of the 17th November' and at the Ministry of Education. Since the immigration authorities repeatedly referred them back to the University and Ministry offices, they found themselves caught up in a vicious circle. From the afternoon of the day on which they first opened their campaign for permission to leave the country they were kept under constant and quite overt surveillance by relays of plain-clothes policemen working round the clock.

Eventually, on the morning of the fourth day, after they had spent the night in a small room occupied by a fellow student, the six Somalis led by Mahdi Ismail appealed to the Italian Embassy, which represented Somalia's interests in Czechoslovakia. A formal protest lodged by the Embassy at the Prague Foreign Ministry produced no immediate result, so the students spent the following night in the Embassy library, which stands a little distance from the main building. As they emerged into the street next morning, Mahdi Ismail was arrested immediately in front of the Italian Embassy by three car-loads of policemen with drawn pistols, and dragged into one of the three cars. The others learnt later that their leader was driven straight to Prague airport and there forced to enter a plane bound for Cairo.

By indulging in these strong-arm tactics, the Prague authorities were evidently trying to rob the party of their leader and thereby shake their determination. Their plans miscarried, however. A further protest by the Italian Ambassador secured an exit permit from the Foreign Ministry. The police spies were withdrawn from that moment onwards, and, despite previous repeated assertions that all the hotel rooms in Prague were booked up for an indefinite period, the students now managed to find accommodation without difficulty.

On their last evening in Czechoslovakia the remaining five Somalis were besieged in their hotel by a stream of visitors. Loyal communist students from Ghana, South Africa and Somalia itself tried to talk them into staying. All the unpleasantnesses which the party had undergone since the beginning of their sojourn in Czechoslovakia were painted as "errors", and they were promised paradise on earth in the name of the Czech government.

All endeavours on the part of the Prague Communists and their African accomplices were without avail. These Somali students' faith in communist promises had been destroyed once and for all. They had recognized the true aims and intentions of Prague's 'Aid for the New Africa' and its up-and-coming elite. "For the first time," declared one of them, 23-year old Adam Abdi Ahmed, "we had experienced for ourselves the difference between freedom and constraint." Both he and the other Somali students who have escaped from Czechoslovakia intend to study in the West and to ensure, at the same time, that their experiences are publicised in Africa.

(THE PLASTIC BOMBERS - *Cont'd from 6*)

Again we must repeat, most of the O.A.S. terrorists in Algeria and in metropolitan France only use Algeria as a pretext. In the political vacuum of present-day France, which has a regime that disdains the support of democratic organisations, of parties and trade unions, the small group of French Fascists wonder if their hour has not struck. But it so happens that nothing is better calculated to re-politicise France than this very threat. The 13th of May, 1958, was, in a sense, a kind of political throwing in of the sponge; one handed things over to de Gaulle so that he could settle the Algerian problem. The demonstrations of these last few weeks have shown that the French have understood that no one, except they themselves, can defend their liberties. Their gesture is significant and meaningful, and should be understood by those who want to destroy those liberties, as well as by those who believe they can maintain them without the help and the support of the whole nation and its legal and political representatives.

Cat Among The Peace Pigeons

by Ernest Kux

THE discord in the international communist movement, as exemplified by the opposition between Moscow and Peking, is making ever greater encroachments on the communist front organisations. Even at the Moscow Congress of the WFTU, dissension with the Italian delegation on the one hand and the Chinese delegation on the other was glossed over only with difficulty. Tension also declared itself within the international communist youth and student movement at the Albanian Youth Congress, where Russian youth officials were heckled by their Albanian hosts in a manner usually reserved for foreign delegations. The Albanians used every trick in the book to secure recognition of Hoxha's policy.

Open hostilities broke out at the meeting of the World Peace Council held in Stockholm recently and intended to pave the way for the World Congress of 1962. This much can be inferred from the scanty reports which have only just become available, principally from Chinese quarters. According to them, the Chinese, supported by the Albanian, Korean, Vietnamese and Australian delegations, together with a number of African and Latin American participants, espoused the view that the communist peace movement must radically alter its strategy. Instead of pressing exclusively for disarmament and prohibition of atomic weapons, as it had done hitherto, it must encourage the struggle against colonialism and support national liberation movements by every available means.

The leader of the Chinese delegation, Liao Cheng-chih, a senior Party official, demanded in a speech made on December 16 that the world peace movement should orientate itself more toward the "broad masses of the people" and not rely merely on "personalities from the highest social strata". The peace movement should not, he continued, be required to trim its sails to every diplomatic move made by "this or that country"—i.e. the Soviet Union. According to Liao, "peaceful coexistence between the oppressed nations and imperialism and colonialism" is hard to implement; the struggle of the oppressed peoples should not be relaxed until the imperialist system is utterly destroyed. Negotiations need not, he conceded, be dispensed with, but the "masses" must at the same time be mobilised and must fight against imperialism with all the means at their disposal. Liao went on to criticize Soviet summit diplomacy and Khrushchev's attempts to achieve a Russo-American bilateralism. He declared:

"The settlement of international disputes through peaceful negotiation by no means implies that major international problem can be solved by relying only on negotiations among a few big powers. Major international problems must be solved by the peoples of

the world and by the nations of the world, big or small, strong or weak. The idea of a few big countries straightening out international problems without respecting the opinion of small countries is also wrong and can never be realised... The days when a few big powers could control the destiny of the world are gone."

The leader of the Chinese delegation also denounced the United Nations as an "instrument of imperialism". It was idle to say that American control of the U.N. was a thing of the past merely because the U.N. was occasionally used by the communist countries as a platform from which to unmask imperialism and because many new nations had been accepted as members. The Chinese spokesman stressed, finally, that world peace was still threatened, that the danger of war still existed and that the United States was preparing for a world war.

The Chinese delegate Liu Ning-yi, also a senior Party official, expressed overt criticism of Soviet disarmament policy and declared that it was only damaging national liberation movements:

"There are some who hold that general and complete disarmament is the only road to peace, that it is the basic task of the movement for the defence of world peace at the present time, and that it is the key to the solution of all the pressing problems of our time. They hold that the national independence movement should be subordinated to the movement for general and complete disarmament, and that if general and complete disarmament is achieved, all the important problems of the world will be solved. This, however, is an erroneous and dangerous point of view, and one with which one cannot concur..."

"As far as the oppressed nations are concerned, whether Laos, Algeria, Angola or the Cameroons, our most vital task is to build up and augment their armed forces for the struggle against imperialism. Under no circumstances should the small forces presently at their disposal be diminished or disbanded. What countries that have already gained their independence, like Cuba, need is not a reduction in the armed forces which they have only just built up but their strengthening for the defence of their country's independence. Experience has shown that they can liberate themselves and achieve peace only through their own struggles, not through a campaign for total disarmament."

Liu further emphasised that the national independence movement could bring imperialism to its knees more quickly than any talk of disarmament. In order to encourage national independence movements the world peace movement, too, must make stronger endeavours to "unmask the face of the enemy of

(Continued on page 11)

Without Comment

LETTERS IN PRAVDA ATTACK EXECUTION OF GOVT. POLICIES

Soviet Communist Party's official organ Pravda received 341,138 letters in 1961 meant for publication in its correspondence columns.

Giving this information, the newspaper says in a recent editorial that thousands of these found place in its pages.

Letters to the editor are a favourite medium of Soviet readers to criticize the execution of Government policies though not the Government.

Particularly, since the 22nd Congress of the party last November, when the campaign against Stalinism was renewed, letter writers have criticized more and more strongly what Pravda describes as irregularities in shops, collectives, institutions and scientific laboratories.

Through all the letters ran the thought that they must work and live better in the communist way, in Pravda's words.

Over 4,000 letters were on Soviet cosmonauts' flights and nearly 16,000 about the Soviet Communist Party's new programme and statutes emphasizing Leninism and democracy in the inner party life.

— *Hindustan Times*, February 7

RED'S COLLABORATION WITH CONGRESS IN U.P.

The Uttar Pradesh branch of the Communist Party of India has decided to collaborate with the Congress in the elections "in a gigantic crusade against the Jan Sangh and communalism," it is learnt here.

Evidence of this is found in Lucknow, where the main contestants for the City Parliamentary constituency are Mr. Atal Behari Vajpai, a front-ranking Jan Sangh parliamentarian, and the Congress candidate, Mr. B. K. Dhawan.

The Communist Party on Wednesday formed a committee under the chairmanship of a former High Court judge for mobilising support to Mr. Dhawan. His campaign is being gradually taken over by the Communists, who have fanned out into Muslim mohallas to create secular consciousness among them.

A former Minister, Mr. Ali Zaheer, who is contesting the Lucknow West Vidhan Sabha constituency, has also been promised support by the Communists, notwithstanding that a candidate of their own party is already seeking election from that constituency.

In Lucknow Central they have stepped up their campaign in favour of the Congress Vidhan Sabha candidate, Mr. Mahabir P. Srivastava. In the remain-

ing East Lucknow constituency, where a triangular contest between the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Triloki Singh, the Congress and the Jan Sangh is slated, the Communists have yet to make up their minds whom to support.

They are much too angry with the P.S.P. to proclaim it a party of the Left as opposed to the Congress.

Similarly in the two prestige constituencies of Balrampur, where the Congress candidate, Mrs. Subhadra Joshi, is fighting against the Jan Sangh candidate, Mr. Atalbihari Vajpai, for the parliamentary seat, and in the Jaunpur City Vidhan Sabha seat, where the Jan Sangh leader, Mr. Y. D. Dubey, is fighting against the Finance Minister, Mr. Hargovind Singh, the Communists have lent their full support to the Congress.

In Balrampur a large number of Communist workers have been brought in to support the Congress candidate. At places far too much enthusiasm is being displayed by the Communists for the Congress, to the embarrassment of the latter.

In Jaunpur, the local Communist Party is solidly backing Congress candidates. Batches of Communist workers from the neighbouring district of Varanasi and Azamgarh are also being sent by State leaders.

The support for secularism and democracy, now being given to candidates outside their party circles by communists, is confined, however, to candidates of the ruling party. The P.S.P. and other Left groups have not yet received offers of help from the Communists, but in any case their support is still considered of dubious political value.

— *Indian Express*, February 17.

COMMUNISTS TO BACK PROGRESSIVES IN CONGRESS

The existence of political differences between the Soviet Union and Red China was admitted on Wednesday by Mr. Dinkar Mehta, general secretary of the Gujarat Communist Party and a member of the National Council of the C.P.I.

He was addressing members of the Harold Laski Institute of Political Science, on "The Communist Party and the elections." He stressed that the Soviet Union and Communist China were faced with different political situations and hence the emphasis of each country differed.

China emphasised on the evils of colonialism, but this did not mean that it wanted war. Their theoretical differences, he said, could not be described as rift.

Mr. Mehta replying to a question described Mr. Menon as a representative of the progressive elements in the Congress and added it was the policy of the Communist Party to support progressives in the Congress.

Regarding the Chinese "aggression", he described it as a border dispute. The Party, he opined, refused

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to consider the Chinese occupation of Indian territories and the Portuguese occupation of Goa on equal footing.

Mr. Mehta demanded clear demarcation of the border. He accused those who clamoured for military action against China of wanting to drag India into Anglo-American camp.

He disclosed the Communist Party of India would make necessary changes in the Constitution of the country so as to remove limitations in introducing socialist measures. —*Indian Express*, February 16.

SINO-SOVIET DELEGATES CLASH: ARMS CUT ISSUE

For the second day today, Indian and other neutralist delegates to the second Afro-Asian Writers Conference in Cairo applied their talents for compromise to the task of reconciling two giants of the communist camp—the Soviet Union and China.

Ten hours of bitter debate in closed-door sub-committee meetings, three postponements to soothe frayed nerves and several drafts were necessary before the Sino-Soviet differences on the relative importance of "disarmament" and "national liberation" could be composed.

Many members of the Russian delegation did not take the trouble to hide their chagrin at the headway the Chinese Communists appeared to have made in winning over the "progressive" writers of several emergent countries of Africa by "subterfuge."

Disarmament, the Chinese argue, is nothing but a device to force the freedom fighters of Africa to give up arms in the interests of Soviet-American "co-existence."

In defence, the Russian delegate, Mr. Anatoli Sofronov, has, however, pointed out that the people of U.A.R., Algeria and many other nations are guarding or fighting for their freedom with Russian arms or Russian aid. Disarmament, as an issue affecting the future of entire mankind, however, deserves priority, he said.

Thus, the Russians at this conference are trying to accommodate the "Chinese line". But the Chinese have made clear that they will use every forum and all means at their disposal for anti-Soviet propaganda.

Mr. Mao Tun, the Chinese Minister of Culture, last night went so far as to suggest that, to talk of peace means compromise with the United States.

"Only agents of imperialism talk that way," he said.

The Russians were apparently willing to go along with the Chinese in condemning imperialism but drew the line when it came to naming the United States as the "leader of the colonialist camp."

"The Chinese talk of fighting America," Mr. Sofronov quipped, "but issue serious warnings when American aircraft fly over Chinese territory while we shoot them down." —*Times of India*, February 16

(PEACE PIGEONS — Cont'd from page 9)

American imperialism". Finally, Liu supported a proposal by the Guinean delegate Diallo that the theme of the Communist World Peace Congress of 1962 should be the "struggle for peace, independence and disarmament". The Albanian spokesman Misha went so far as to demand that the next congress should confine itself entirely to the subject of national independence. He accused "certain people of having made concessions to imperialism, and pointed out that although the "forces of peace" were weaker formerly (i.e. in Stalin's day) they had dared to give "battle", whereas today, although they were stronger, they were tending to retreat.

The Soviet delegation and their supporters insisted that disarmament should remain the sole theme of the next congress. According to the Chinese, they were principally supported in this by the delegations of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, France, India, and Portugal. The Polish spokesman, in particular, pointed to the successes hitherto achieved by the Russo-American disarmament talks and urged that they should be supported and exploited by the communist peace movement. It is apparent from the sparse Russian reports of the congress, which remained silent about these controversies and made absolutely no mention of the speeches made by the Chinese and Albanian delegates, that the Soviet delegate (former Soviet Writers' Union Secretary) Alexei Surkov came out strongly in favour of internal unity among the peace fighters and of co-operation with all "progressive forces".

He demanded the building up of contacts on a broad front and rejected the sort of "sectarianism" which insisted on the validity of a single political position and so gave assistance to "warmongers". It was evidently feared in Russian quarters that an adoption of the radical Chinese course by the world peace movement would frighten off the fellow-travellers who had hitherto proved a serviceable instrument of Soviet policy in Western countries.

After lengthy debate, the Stockholm session of the World Peace Council decided to hold a world congress for universal disarmament and peace, which meant that the Chinese faction's proposal to place national independence on the agenda had been rejected. As a sop to and bait for the underdeveloped countries, a long resolution was passed expressing support for national liberation movements and approving the Chinese proposal to call a "solidarity congress" open to the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

This does not, however, mean that the controversies over the radical Chinese attitude, which received considerable support, are now at an end. Judging by these internal dissensions and the negative reaction of world opinion to the Russian atomic tests, the usefulness of the communist world peace movement as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy must now be fairly limited.

With Many Voices

"The deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world."

—Tennyson.

If it helps India, I will not be a half communist, but a full communist.

—Prime Minister Nehru, *Time Magazine*, February 23.

By all accounts, the Congress rebels are willing to go to hell provided Mr. Menon does not accompany them there.

—Frank Moraes, *Indian Express*, February 12.

Every vote cast in favour of the Communist Party would go to strengthen the Chinese aggression on the sacred soil of India.

—N. Sanjiva Reddy, Congress President, *Free Press Journal*, February, 16.

If Premier does not like us for exposing Mr. Menon's pro-communist activities, then we also will have to say that we dislike Mr. Nehru for his attitude.

—Asoka Mehta, *Indian Express*, February, 15.

Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon (speaking at a meeting in North Bombay) asked China to withdraw from the Indian territories "in the interest of Peace, Socialism and in her own interest".

—*Indian Express* January 22.

Menon is not communist, but just a socialist as I am.

—Prime Minister Nehru, *Times of India*, February 20.

If Mr. Nehru goes on insisting that Mr. Menon is Socialist like himself, he will only be creating doubts in people's minds about his own ideological colouration.

—Mr. M. R. Masani, *Indian Express*, February 22.

Even the nives should be able to conclude for themselves that behind Mr. Kripalani stand all the reactionary elements in Indian national life while behind Mr. Krishna Menon can be seen the new rising vision of Indian national democratic front in being. The active cooperation of progressive national elements forged for the victory of Mr. Krishna Menon, must not be allowed to fall apart after the elections are over. We communists have not only ardently desired it, but actively worked for it.

—P. C. Joshi, *New Age*, CPI Weekly, February 18.

There are now three categories of Congressmen, as seen respectively through the eyes of the communists, the Nehru Socialists, and from the viewpoint of just plain ordinary Congressmen. While the first are known as "Progressive Congressmen" and the second as "aggressive socialists", the third must content themselves with the simple title of Congressmen. The significant fact is that the first two categories, in the

eyes of the communists and the Nehru Socialists constitute the same people. On the other hand the third category compose mere Congressmen of the old school who when they cannot be ignored are tolerated. The old school type is plainly going out of fashion if not already outmoded.

—Frank Moraes, *Indian Express*, February 26.

(GRESHAM'S LAW — Cont'd from page 5)

military coup in some circles), capacity to judge representatives and their integrity and general usefulness or otherwise, the need to take a more active part in selecting persons and similar eagerness for a constructive lead from politicians counter-balance the prevailing cynical despair and forms the hopeful aspect of the scene.

People are moved by solid economic interests no doubt but they are also moved by imagination and imponderables.

The Swatantra Party has dispelled the Nehru glamour largely and has made criticism of socialism respectable. People no longer (on the whole) look to socialism as the only salvation and path to progress.

But it has damaged its cause by hurting the national sentiment in its flirting with separatists like the Muslim League, Punjabi Suba, Communists, Dravida Kazagam and its welcome to shady Congress dissidents. The Swatantra tends to defeat its own strategy.

The Jana Sangh is succeeding in mobilising the cultural imagination and the national imponderables, (historical and Utopian) together with present discontents and is likely as a more homogeneous body to grow in influence. The propaganda of Nehru against its "communalism" is losing force.

With the appeal of Jana Sangh to national and cultural sentiment and its success in mobilising the devotion and team work of the younger generation and its gradual training in democratic politics and the emergence of the Swatantra party with its appeal to experienced administrators and big business, the chances for building strong bulwarks against subversive economics and the growing dictatorial trends in Congress have *decisively grown brighter*. The gulf between educated and uneducated is no longer so formidable an obstacle as it seemed last time. The sterling worth of democracy in effecting a peaceful transfer of power and its solid encouragement to sound leadership *when it shows itself* unmistakably in reliable personalities, shone forth in my experience during this strenuous campaign and is shared by all our workers. The decision rests with the leaders who emerge in response to this experience of the receptiveness of the people in all classes to the democratic process.