

The Bengal Hindu Mahasabha

FORWARD BLOC

A POLITICAL WEEKLY

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ONE ANNA

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FORWARD BLOC

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

*The Bengal**Hindu Mahasabha*

The annual All-India Conference of the Hindu Mahasabha was held in Calcutta towards the close of last year. As a conference it was a great success and it afforded considerable satisfaction to the Mahasabha leaders who began to hope that their organisation would forge ahead in Bengal. At that time, it was whispered about that the conference was merely a preparation for the coming Municipal Election in Calcutta and subsequent events have not belied that report.

With a view to promoting the civic welfare and advancement of Calcutta and in order to avoid unnecessary friction and clash over the elections, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha arrived at an understanding through their respective representatives. The terms of the understanding were duly published in the press. The basis of the understanding was that that the elections would be run in the name of the Joint Congress Corporation Election Board and that all those who would be elected would join the Congress Municipal Association. The Congress Corporation Election Board would co-opt six nominees of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Committee that would select candidates would have an equal number of representatives from both the organisations. But the elections would not be run separately by the Hindu Mahasabha nor would there be a separate Hindu Mahasabha Bloc in the

Corporation. If any communal question came up before the Corporation in future, the Congress Municipal Association would not make it a party question but would allow liberty to the members to vote as they desired.

The afore-mentioned agreement did not last long. Differences arose over the selection of candidates and the agreement had to be abandoned.

Prior to the above understanding with the Hindu Mahasabha, I had made a public appeal to all organisations interested in the elections, and particularly to the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League, asking for their co-operation in the domain of civic affairs, in spite of any differences that might exist on other questions. I also addressed letters to several organisations in this connection. We naturally felt gratified when the Hindu Mahasabha responded in the above manner.

According to our reading of the situation, the temporary agreement was possible because of the pro-nationalist elements in the Hindu Mahasabha. The agreement fell through because the die-hard communal elements in the Hindu Mahasabha who were throughout opposed to any understanding with the Congress, ultimately got the upper hand.

There has been a countrywide propaganda against us because of our understanding with the Hindu Mahasabha over civic affairs. Much of this propaganda is mendacious, while some of it is based on misunderstanding. We are convinced that the basis of the understanding was a sound one and was fully consonant with Congress principles. If the understanding had been implemented in due course, the principles of nationalism would have trium-

phed and not those of communalism. Unfortunately, to some politicians and political agents we are the *bete noire* and any stick is good enough to beat us with. But we desire to assert even at this late hour that the basis on which we arrived at a temporary understanding with the Hindu Mahasabha is a basis on which a similar understanding could be arrived at with any other organisation.

The New Calcutta Municipal Act which is the result of the recent Amending Bill and according to which elections have just been held, has created a new situation for Calcutta which is fraught with danger. If the Indian members of the Corporation, both Hindu and Moslem, do not join hands, then the Corporation will pass into the hands of Britishers. A handful of Britishers will begin to dominate the Corporation as they have been dominating the Bengal Assembly.

We tried to avert this calamity by seeking the co-operation of the Hindu Mahasabha in civic affairs while adhering to Congress principles. We have been disappointed. Moreover, the tactics employed by some Hindu Mahasabha leaders for whom we had great personal regard, as also by some Hindu Mahasabha workers in connection with the elections, have caused us pain and sorrow. The Hindu Mahasabha did not fight a clean fight.

What is more, the Hindu Mahasabha candidates included men who had tried their level best to break the Congress Municipal Association and to that end had formed the United Party in the Corporation in co-operation with British and Nominated Groups of councillors. Some of them have been re-elected and one could easily anticipate how they would behave in future. The Hindu Mahasabha has

given evidence of greater desire to down the Congress than to save the Corporation from British domination.

It remains to be seen if any other Indian group in the Corporation will show more keenness to resist British domination than to fight the Congress.

The above action of the Hindu Mahasabha is the beginning of a new phase in its history. It has come forward to play a political role and to make a bid for the political leadership of Bengal, or at least of the Hindus of Bengal who have been the backbone of Nationalism in this country. With a real Hindu Mahasabha, we have no quarrel and no conflict. But with a political Hindu Mahasabha that seeks to replace the Congress in the public life of Bengal and for that purpose has already taken the offensive against us, a fight is inevitable. This fight has just begun.

Sethuram Anandaram

THE REAL DIFFERENCE

The present international situation has pushed the question of India's struggle for freedom to the fore. The difference between the Left and the Right has to-day been reduced to the simple issue of fight *versus* no-fight, which virtually amounts to compromise with British imperialism. The real issue is not however so simple as a superficial view of things would seem to envisage. There are deeper implications beneath it which are not only necessary to unravel, but to emphasise with all the force that we can command. At bottom it is not some honest difference of opinion in regard to India's preparedness to launch an immediate struggle or altogether doing away with it that keeps the Right apart from the Left. The difference goes deeper, it is fundamental because it pertains to the ideologies swaying two conflicting schools.

Let us make what we say absolutely clear. In spite of bellicose verbosity splashing through the speeches, writings and resolutions of the Rightists, it is certain

beyond a shade of doubt that they will not hurl the country into the vortex of a grim fight. These are no more than mere stage-thunders to trap the unwary. They could have gone on uniformly with this game of bluff and bluster if *only* the Indian people were concerned in the matter. But, unfortunately for them, there is another factor to reckon with. Bent on a compromise as they are, they must occasionally afford to the other party an inkling into their real selves. Sheer necessity then makes them throw off the mask. It is for this reason that from the sombre Mahatma down to the garrulous Satyamurti, the Rightists have occasionally to talk of a "settlement" with the Government. So it becomes necessary to tax diplomatic ingenuity to find out a basis for compromise. Resolutions adopted formerly in the full flush of idealism, become tempered with prudence and undergo a distinct watering-down. Pure and undiluted independence then becomes beautifully vague and elastic in its "substance."

As we have hinted before, there is a deep-laid plan behind the whole move for compromise. A "settlement" may at most result in the transference of some power from the white to a brown bureaucracy. It may bring about some changes on the fringe of the existing social and economic order. It will not certainly effect an overhaul of the present system. And that is what the Rightists want. As a matter of fact, the Congress, patronised and financed by the capitalists, thankfully recognised by the princes and zamindars as a bulwark against a mighty mass up-surge, eager to come to terms with the bourgeois communalists among the Muslims represented by the League, and mortally afraid of a large influx of kisans and mazdoors within its fold, cannot be sincerely after a revolution that will sweep away the present order and usher in another absolutely new. History has testified to the fact again and again that those who win power, ultimately keep it. The disappointed and desperate middle classes of Germany, lavishly financed by the industrial magnates of Ruhr, led the Nazi vanguard and put Hitler in power. Therefore,

the Governmental authority in Germany did not find its way to trickle down to the masses. On the other side, the famished soldiers of Russia, drawn mostly from the proletarian classes, pushed on Lenin to power on the crest of their revolt. The Government therefore, took its pattern from the class of people who won power.

If the Rightist leaders today seek to shirk a fight, it is only because they know it full well that in the course of the struggle tremendous mass-energies now ready for a burst-out, will be unleashed which they will fail to control, with the consequence, that the movement will pass on to Leftist hands. That will prove to be a serious menace to the *Status quo* which they are eager to maintain with some changes. Therefore, they are bent on avoiding that infinitely dark contingency by all conceivable means.

We have been led on afresh to this train of thoughts by Mahatma Gandhi's recent article in the *Harijan* on the problem of States. In the course of the article Mahatmaji has said, "I personally do not desire the extinction of the Princely Order. But I do want the Princes to recognise the signs of the times and shed a large part of their autocracy." The implication of the statement needs no lengthy dilating upon. And if we link up this statement, which is but an emblem of a comprehensive outlook, with the present plans and policies of the Rightists, then the underlying significance of their compromise move will become crystal clear to all. Again, it is against this broader background that Gandhiji's non-violence too, has to be politically evaluated. Non-violence, as a spiritual creed, is the highest ideal that humanity can conceive of. In fact, mankind have been moving steadily towards this ideal of supreme love, which alone is capable of bringing about an efflorescence of all that is noble and beautiful in human nature. But Mahatmaji's *Ahimsa*, as a close scrutiny of his numerous speeches and writings will bear out, becomes, when reduced to political terms, a safeguard against an overhaul of the present social and economic order. Indeed, as we have pointed

