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TIME FOR A DIALOGUE

R. VENKATARAMAN

THE ALL-INDIA ACHARYA Sammelan, which met at Paunar between January 16 and 18, 1976, has given a timely lead to resolve the tensions and restore a healthy polity in the country. The participants are all eminent men, Vice-Chancellors, former Judges, Professors, scientists and social workers, who do not belong to any political organization, nor hold any committed views on questions. They also had the guidance of no less a person than Vinobha Bhave, a true Gandhian in thought, word and deed. The conclusions of the Paunar Conference are, therefore, entitled to great respect and attention from the country, the Government, the people and organizations.

It is unnecessary to dwell at any length on the recent events in the country and the political impasse that has cropped out of it. Any attempt to blame only one side will be neither true, nor will it lead to a solution of the problem. Nor is it necessary to probe old sores and undergo self-inflicted torture. There have been occasions in the past in our national history when we had drawn a veil over the unpleasant and thought only of the future. The great role as

mediators played during the freedom struggle by Mr Sapru and Mr Jayakar from time to time has emphasized the truth that nothing is gained by trying to apportion blame for the unpleasant events of the past. The Acharyas have, therefore, given the right lead diverting attention from the past to the future.

In an objective appraisal of the national scene, the Acharyas have noted certain constructive developments following the declaration of Emergency such as greater concern for the needs of the poorer sections of the population, calm in educational institutions, improved industrial relations, containment of inflation, effective action against smuggling, hoarding and black money, absence of communal, regional and linguistic tensions and improvement in economic management and administration. The halting of the galloping inflation and the progressive reduction in wholesale prices, to which the SWARAJYA had adverted earlier, are among the major achievements during the year 1975. The significant reduction in the loss of man-days and the improved discipline among the industrial, clerical and administra-

tive workers has reversed the trend of deterioration that had overtaken the country during the recent past. These factors have revived the confidence that the economy is now poised for recovery. Had these improvements occurred without the unnatural situation of an Emergency involving detention without trial of a number of social and political workers committed to the creed of non-violence and *ahimsa*, curtailment of civil liberties and censorship of the press and parliamentary proceedings, it would have been a matter for congratulation. As the Acharyas have pointed out, the indefinite continuation of the unnatural state of affairs is "not good for the health of the nation". It is well-known that a government is run on precedents. If one gets into the habit of governing with the aid of special powers, one will forget the art of government without that instrument very soon. The fact that we have not been able to shake off Defence of India Rules after the war and have adopted in our subsequent legislations several of those extraordinary powers prove the point. The sooner we revert to normalcy and restore fundamental human rights the

greater will be our peace and happiness.

It is idle to imagine that *status-quo-ante* can be restored overnight. Nor is one sure that it should be. As noted by the Acharyas, the gain from Emergency, in so far as it has reduced anti-social activities like smuggling, blackmarketing and tax evasion, should be maintained and consolidated and relaxation directed towards honest and constructive criticism, free and frank expression of public grievances and legitimate political activities not involving violence or subversion. Neither the Government nor the Opposition will disagree with the

proposition as enunciated above but unfortunately, there is no bridge by which either side could cross over or meet the other. Like parallel lines, each pursues its path without a meeting. It is only the chosen representative of Mahatmaji, the selfless soul dedicated to the service of the poor and the unfortunate and the living embodiment of truth and non-violence, the saintly Vinobha Bhave, that may be able to play the role of a healer of wounds. No other person commands the confidence of the Government, the Opposition, the intellectuals, the social workers, in fact, the whole country, and can initiate the move for

rapprochement with any degree of confidence or any hope of success.

Once normalcy is restored, questions like electoral reforms, changes in the Constitution, to suit the needs of the less fortunate sections of society, or a code of duties along with a bill of rights, could be discussed and formulated on the basis of a consensus and not on mere plurality of votes. If the Paunar document is to become a positive step for restoring normalcy in the country and not to remain a pious declaration, Vinobhaji has to assume the mantle of a mediator. The country looks up to him to save the situation.

A SKIT :

THIS INFLAMMATION!

N. V. ESWAR

NEIGHBOUR NAG is never happy unless he holds an hour-long argument with the vegetable vendor, over the soaring prices. One day the arguments became a little heated. So I went out to learn what it was all about.

Neighbour Nag turned on me and said: "See, this man here says that the price of every blessed thing in his basket has gone up only because there is Inflammation. The grocer says but for this

heinous Inflammation he would sell everything dirt cheap. Why, he would even give things free to you. The dhoby repeats it. The priest chants 'Inflammation, Inflammation, Inflammation', instead of his usual undecipherable mutterings. The barber has marked up his charges because of Inflammation. The landlord raises the rent almost every other month due to Inflammation again. The Electricity Board, the Corpora-

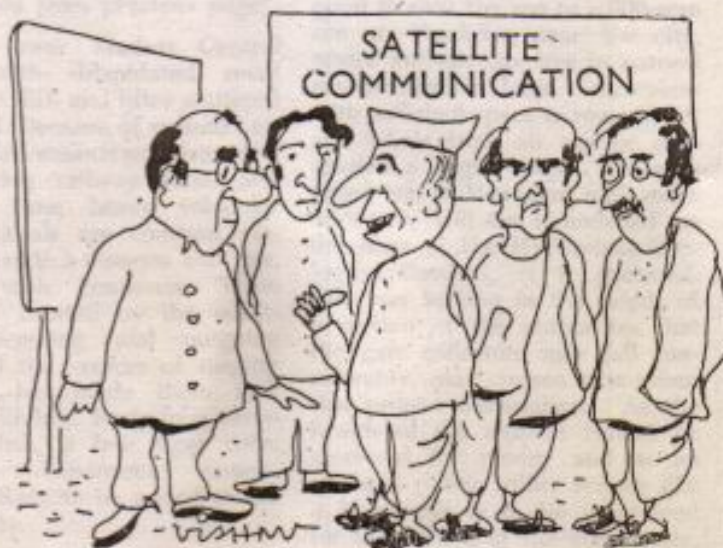
tion, the Railways, the Airlines, the Postal Department, why everyone wants to get more. All because there is this Inflammation."

WHAT DIFFERENCE?

When the tirade of Nag subsided a bit, I thought the poor man had got everything wrong. At the same time, it is not easy to correct a person like Nag who always stays put with whatever had entered his head. It is always injunction with him when it should be injection and *vice versa*. It is vacillation and never vaccination with him. Yet I made a feeble attempt to put him right. I mildly said: "Mr Nag, it is not Inflammation that is at fault. It is Inflation."

Mr Nag countered: "Oh! What difference does it make? Inflation or Inflammation? They mean the same. Money has inflamed into a big boil. It has blown up beyond all proportions. Like a boil. Or a carbuncle. So I say it is nothing but Inflammation. But for the sake of argument I shall agree with you. Because everybody has inflated the prices of everything there is this very big Inflation. Then the matter becomes quite simple. All you have to do is just deflate everything by a prick."

"But how can you prick money, Mr Nag? Maybe you can prick it in a number of places with a pin. It would remain the same. On the other hand, if you prick large holes or cut it up, the banks



"My satellites never leave me alone—so I have no problem in communicating with them . . ."