
NOTES & TOPICS

Narayan at Oxford

DURING the visit to England in November of Jayaprakash Narayan, the former leader of the Indian Praja Socialist Party, a small conference was arranged at his request at St. Antony's College, Oxford. Its purpose was to discuss the ideas for the reorganisation of Indian society put forward by Jayaprakash in a memorandum called "*A plea for reconstruction of Indian polity.*" The conference was made up of philosophers, sociologists, and economists. It was agreed that no report should be issued, but there were no mysteries about the general drift of the conversation.

Jayaprakash, sensing perhaps the changes which will come over Indian politics when Nehru eventually withdraws, wishes to turn into an effective political programme the Gandhian ideas which have been kept alive during Nehru's reign by Vinoba Bhavé and the Bhoodan movement. Jayaprakash repudiates the principles and practice of the Nehru period. These are expressed in the constitution adopted in 1949, in which Gandhism has virtually no place. Jawaharlal Nehru has sought to make India a modernised, secularist parliamentary democracy of the Western type.

Jayaprakash concentrates his attack on the "party system" which goes with this constitution. According to him it has carried political faction into the village and has divided Indian society in matters where otherwise it might have been united. Government has been an expression of "urban values"; but only 20 per cent of the country's population live in towns. For the village, it is "something remote, inexplicable, uncontrollable."

THIS ANALYSIS WAS CHALLENGED by many of the participants in the conference. They admitted that Indian society might be in "disintegration." The individual had lost many of his traditional connections with society, and this caused neurosis. But the new institutions could be a remedy. The individual might have lost his sense of "belonging" to a group, but the maligned political parties offered new groups which could once again knit together the "atom-

ised" individuals. In them the individual could find a larger purpose than his own. The parties could be educative and reforming. For example, they were breaking down the feudal structure where it still existed. . . .

Jayaprakash proposed that the focus of political life should be shifted from the national parliament to the village. The village community, run by a council directly elected by the villagers, should be the principal organ of government. Since many functions of government extended beyond the village, the villages should be grouped into units of about 150; the councils to administer the groups—called the *Panchayet Samithi*—should be elected indirectly by the primary village councils. The qualification for being elected to the basic village council would be residence in the village, and the people elected to the superior councils would therefore also be villagers. By this means, Jayaprakash hoped to prevent the intrusion of the party into the village. This is what he calls the "communitarian" system of government.

Jayaprakash did not propose to abolish the superior strata of government. These would be needed for such purposes as defence, foreign policy, currency control. But he argued that a surprising amount of the business of government would be carried out by the *Panchayet Samithi*. The powers of the upper strata would be devolved from below, and would be restricted by law.

Discussion at the conference fastened upon the problem of parties in the new structure. Jayaprakash hoped that the entire system might function without them; but he was willing to envisage parties, either new parties or the same as at present, functioning in the higher strata. It was argued that, short of actually prohibiting the parties by law, it was impossible to prevent crusading parties from operating. These might have one supreme object: to obtain power at the centre in order to apply their panacea to society. This would overthrow the communitarian system. It did not become clear how this was to be prevented.

The conference was divided about the virtues of Village Government. Would villages be more enlightened than political parties? Would they be more democratic? One of those taking part, who had been born in Montenegro, described the oligarchic system in his own village. Somebody else quoted Marx on the traditional village society in India.

These idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of oriental despotism. They restrained the human mind in the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of

superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. . . .

IF THERE WERE TO BE NO political parties, who would control the upper strata of government? Who would turn out a government which had exhausted its mandate? Jayaprakash evidently envisaged at the top a fairly extensive system of administration, even if less elaborate than at present. A central government would, for example, have to control defence, and a heavy industry which the army would need. (Jayaprakash would prefer Gandhian methods of natural defence, but realised that at present India was unlikely to discard its army.) A bureaucracy would exist to run this administration. Some people at the conference felt that, if there were no political parties to control the bureaucracy, the régime would turn into a bureaucratic despotism, rather like Tsarist Russia or the Habsburg empire before its liberation. The threat from China made this more likely; the bureaucrats would extend their powers on the pretext of national emergency. Then, a reform which had begun as a kind of Rousseauist simplification of society and an attempt to restore "true freedom," might end in a worse form of authoritarianism than the present.

The conference thought that Jayaprakash was legislating for "a status society": village councils could hardly guide India through a period of rapid social or economic change. But, then, it was supposed that he did not want economic change. Given his system of thought, he must be against industrialisation. He was legislating to remove some of the social or psychological ills of India, but at the cost of giving up ideas of economic progress, and of condemning India to spiritualised poverty.

Jayaprakash's reply showed that his thought was much more subtle and more realistic. He did not despise industry: he wanted it differently organised. He thought that about 65 per cent of the industry at present carried on in India could be localised in the village, where the worker was better off than in a town slum. All that was needed was organisation and small-scale unity of production. He would like to see the very distinction between agriculture and industry become much more blurred. Certainly the peasant must use machinery—but let the machinery be brought to the village. Even so, industry was not the answer to India's needs. The chief need was food. Industry did not manufacture food, and could not do so. India's food output would be increased very greatly if India's chief asset, labour, was organised properly. Here was the task for the village councils. They could organise the farmer to dig wells, to use better seeds, to plough better, to consolidate land-

holdings, to market more cheaply, to use up-to-date methods.

The conference asked if this was not already being done by the "Community Development Projects" of Nehru's India. Jayaprakash admitted that was not wholly bad, but they had been spoiled by what Chinese Communists call "commandism." Petty officials had ordered the peasants about, had thus set the peasants against them, and had failed therefore to light the spirit of self-help in the villages. Here, again, Jayaprakash showed that the base of his thought was a belief in the native goodness of man if released from arbitrary political institutions.

Goodness—true. But it could not be relied on by itself. Here Jayaprakash's realism showed itself. The alternation of vision and realism, of radical experiment and sobriety, is what makes him important. The moment he is about to be dismissed as utopian, he suddenly comes out with remarks which show him, as the son of a Bihar peasant, to have fewer illusions about the nature of the peasant than the politicians whom he criticises. The village councils are not to be left to themselves, to act untutored. They are to be shepherded by an enormously expanded Bhoodan movement. This is to act rather like one of the great monastic movements of mediæval Christendom. Renouncing the world, and renouncing power, it will nevertheless act as the guide and animator of India's village polity.

Jayaprakash's views provoked all kinds of questions about the West. What effect did the Industrial Revolution really have upon it? How many decades was it before the Industrial Revolution had brought any benefits to the mass of the people? Should India really copy the West? Was Western society sick? Was madness on the increase? If in the West a physically sick man need most often no longer die, did not the West breed more neurosis than in the past? Which was more deadly, appendicitis which might kill a man, or neurosis which might kill him spiritually and impel him also to kill others?

THE CONFERENCE PULLED ITSELF together, and returned to India. Jayaprakash is an "interventionalist." Statements by him are published at every world crisis. He is the enemy of Communism. He denounces the over-mighty Communist states because he is opposed to all *étatisme*. Now India is under actual attack from China. How would an India, constituted as he wishes to see it, provide for its defence if the Chinese attacks continue? Jayaprakash believes that the Indian army is already strong enough to be a fairly effective deterrent to actual attack. The debate at the conference (and throughout

his visit to England) suggested also that he hoped that great-power rivalry would form a protecting roof over India. India could reorganise itself because it could know that in the long run America would not tolerate any large-scale over-running of India by an Asian imperialism.

NOBODY at the conference liked to ask Jayaprakash whether his renunciation, his giving of himself to the Bhoodan movement, precluded an active part by him in bringing into being

the new polity of his memorandum. Certainly he will not seek power by campaigning according to the methods of parliamentary democracy. But if there were bewilderment in India, if public opinion summoned him, if he were drafted—that might be a different matter. Jayaprakash has gone through all the right motions to establish himself as the God-sent leader in the minds of much of India. He has not gone through the motions with the idea that they would be good propaganda. It has just happened.

Guy Wint

Dr. Watson's Dupe

By Andrew Boyd

IT IS high time, now that the Conan Doyle centenary is here, to state the bitter truth. The evidence is unchallengeable. The great Sherlock Holmes was either a great fool, or something worse. Dr. Watson was unquestionably something worse than the honest fool he pretended to be.

Many apparently penetrating studies of the Holmes canon have been made—but all of them by over-affectionate devotees. Has there been a deliberate conspiracy of silence about the painful facts?

Watson was a shameless impostor with a shady past. There are only two possible explanations of Holmes' long association with him. Either the doctor fooled his supposedly brilliant friend from start to finish; or, having fooled him at first, he gained so tight a hold over him that Holmes, after twenty-two years in this evil man's power, was able to escape only by fleeing to lead a hermit's life on the South Downs. The second explanation seems the more likely—and the more appalling.

Watson was an extremely clever fellow, who to my knowledge made only one serious slip. He kept up for years on end his pose as a perpetual innocent, never forgetting to be newly astonished by the wickedness of the world. He prudently spattered his accounts of his life with Holmes with petty inaccuracies about dates and

other trivia—enough of them to keep a whole host of students harmlessly busy—and even with cryptograms calculated to divert ingenious minds into wild speculations like those of the Baconians, the wildest being the theory (Rex Stout's) that Watson was really a woman. But he made just one mistake that cannot be easily explained away, as his vagueness about dates could, as the sort of innocent error that we all make from time to time. And this one slip is quite enough to expose him as an impostor.

In *The Sign of Four*, he solemnly recorded Jonathan Small's confession about the Agra treasure, in which the three other members of the Four were repeatedly described as Sikhs, and—again, repeatedly—named as Abdullah Khan, Dost Akbar, and (to touch a pinnacle of impossibility) Mahomet Singh. Two Mahomedan names and one bizarre Mahomedan-Sikh hybrid. No educated man with years of service in the Indian Army could possibly have recorded them, even if he was recording another man's garbled narrative, without comment. For those who are not familiar with the way that Indian personal names are strictly related to religion, one may explain that Watson might as well have claimed a knowledge of Scotland and then set down a tale about three simple Highland soldiers named Venizelos, Vasco da Gama, and Voroshilov.