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COMMENT

THANKS be to Providence, most grateful thanks, for after all Mrs. Gandhi has made it clear that she does not propose to go to war with Pakistan in the interest of her great friend Brezhnev and his aggressor nation. Whether she did or did not say that war with Pakistan was imminent, no careful reader of the newspapers and of her recent statements as reported in them could escape the impression that it was very much in her thoughts. She expressed great alarm at Pakistan's getting arms from various sources. It was to be one of the important topics of her talks with Brezhnev, etc., etc.

How would it help Brezhnev if India went to war with Pakistan? Simple, Pakistan would not be able to help the Afghan freedom fighters, who have taken refuge in and around Peshawar, and who after so many months of fighting still give the Russians, with their invading force of eighty-eight thousand troops and most modern equipment, a truly tough time. Of course to Brezhnev and alas, to Mrs. Gandhi too it would appear, these refugees are 'rebels'. In reality, they are people struggling by every means possible to free their country from the yoke of the alien invader.

Mrs. Gandhi of course is still doubtful if the Russians have invaded Afghanistan. At the United Nations, she abstained from calling them aggressors, earlier she devoted much effort to making excuses for them. They were in Afghanistan of course, and they were armed foreigners in another country, she could scarcely deny that. But you know, she gently implied, Brezhnev and his Kremlin colleagues were feeling encircled, so they felt compelled to break out. What can you do? They had to have room to breathe; hence their forceful entry into Afghanistan. Conquest of, aggression into? Oh what harsh words! How can you apply them to such gentle people, and above all, such good friends of mine personally, to whom I am much indebted.

Her latest thinking would seem to be, any help I can give them, I must, and Pakistan is certainly crying out for a lesson, but I have too much in India on my hands, troubles, troubles, troubles, and I sense that the people, even my supporters, would not be enthusiastic about a war now, so I had better give up the idea, and say clearly, no war; how absurd to think that I, the apostle of peace, even contemplated such a thing! And

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I'd better make my statement before Brezhnev comes, then he'll know I'm already committed, and will not pressure me.

* * *

In view of the fulsome adulation of Brezhnev and his government which our rulers indulge in, let us see what they really are. Conscience for them does not exist. Nothing is bad for them except what hinders them; nothing good except what helps them. Ethical or moral standards they have none. They rule their enormous country most despotically. They have no use for human rights, the rule of law, individual freedom, judicial independence, civil liberties. Freedom of expression is to them anathema. Tightly controlled, fully censored, are their press and other media. They jam at will foreign broadcasts from countries in which there is freedom of expression. They have deprived countries near them of their independence and dominate them by force of arms, thus creating in effect a vast empire where in all vital matters their word is law. Their elections are a farce; they themselves put up candidates and cause the voters to vote by inflicting penalties on those who abstain. They are opposed to all religions, and do not hesitate on occasion to persecute the followers of any. Their creed is atheism. For truth, they have the scantest regard. Hypocrisy is their other name. They are in reality the most retrograde force in the world to-day. They maintain their 'shock-brigades' in other countries, men and women belonging to the country who put their interest above that of their own country, and carry out their instructions, however detrimental these may be to the land of which they are natives. To an ordinary despot, even to one as cruel as Idi Amin there comes an end, but these men and their predecessors have established and maintain a tyranny to which no end seems in sight. On the contrary, at every opportunity they seize other lands and add them to their empire, ruling either directly or through their puppets. They are a continuing proof that evil is a great force, an independent force. Exploiting to the full the undoubted talent of the Russian people, they have become the greatest military power in the world. Some would say not the greatest, the US is at least equal to them, but they have a special advantage over it, because of their ruthlessness. Life they hold cheap, even that of their own people.

These are the men, whose leader is the honoured and valued friend of Mrs. Gandhi and President Sanjiva Reddy, the men whom they would have us, the Indian people, accept in all sincerity as genuinely honest, thoroughly unselfish, true helpers and guides. From such allies, they apprehend no danger. Perish the thought, they would exclaim emphatically. In Mrs. Gandhi, this is understandable. They are what she is looking forward to becoming, the sole repository of power in the country. And yet, it is to be hoped she realises that in ardently welcoming them, she is supping with the devil and that she who sups in such company needs an exceptionally long spoon. Even the total power she may attain with their help will lose its savour if she in the end has to kneel to them, albeit on the necks of her own people.

FARMERS' MOVEMENT

(Continued from last week)

The term 'absentee landlord' conjures up visions of a landlord who owns hundreds of acres and gives it to sharecroppers, living far away and only sending his representative to collect his share once a year. However, these small landowners are also absentee landlords who continue to hold title to land which they are not cultivating, land, moreover, which they are not interested in making more productive, since the major part of their income comes from their jobs. If you talk of taking land away from absentee owners, you must also take it away from these people and make it over in the names of the relatives who actually live on the land and cultivate it.

There is still another kind of landowner who would like to become an absentee landlord. We run an agricultural research institute and occasionally lease land because we require more than we own or require it in a certain area for a particular trial. Word of this must have spread, because at least twice a month someone comes to offer us his land for cultivation. Many such people have holdings as large as five to ten hectares, mostly irrigated. The prize question is of course why they do not cultivate it themselves. Various reasons are given. The owner is too old and he has nobody to look after the land because he either does not have a son or his son works somewhere in a city; or he has no capital which is required if he wants to take high income giving crops, and does not want the risk of borrowing it. What it amounts to is that for whatever reason, he does not want the trouble of cultivating the land himself. However, he knows that the land has the potential of giving a good income. So if he can be smart enough to find someone else who will take the trouble and the risk, he can get a steady income. At the same time he does not want to lose the hen that lays the golden egg, so he tries to enter into some kind of arrangement which will not leave him vulnerable to the tenancy law.

Even though such men may live on or near the land, they want to forego the responsibility of cultivating the land, and in effect want to become absentee owners. Actually the rationale behind the tenancy law should apply to such cases also, but it does not.

It is necessary to deal with such anomalies and rationalize land ownership before land can be expected to have optimum productivity.

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