forum

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discusses

Reason in Politics

Underlying the current crisis which the country is experiencing is the sense of frustration which pervades our entire society. The basic urge which moves the people is for justice, between man and man, and between region and region. Having been denied justice for the years, the mood today is one of desperation, since mounting injustice have pushed people to a point where they feel their bare survival is at stake. Their hunger cannot be assuaged with rhetorics or ideological outpourings. What is needed is a comprehensive programme for social change. These programmes can only be implemented when they are adopted by political parties, formed by dedicated and trained cadres. Neither is possible without the rehabilitation of political processes and the re-organisation of political parties and their commitment to rational programmes.

In this context, one cannot but deplore the attempts to exploit the religious susceptibilities of the people. By raising bogeys of 'Islam-in-danger' it is sought merely to cloud the basic issues with which society is confronted. When the crying need of the hour is for a rational debate on alternative sets of programmes, when all heads are required to be put together to restructure our society on the foundation of justice, the self-styled 'Islam lovers' are bent upon rousing passions, dividing people, and creating an atmosphere more appropriate for a 'holy expedition, than the 'social revolution' which our society needs.

Equally vicious are attempts to label political opponents as being 'foreign inspired' or 'Hindu-dominated'. These are nothing but desperate actions to avoid joining issue on matters of real substance. If a party puts forward a federal scheme, aimed at redressing injustice between region and region, which another finds unacceptable, the honest response would be to put forward alternative solutions. Instead, there is a volley of abuse directed at the proponents of the federal scheme, who are dubbed as "secessionists". Yet these holier-than-thou "integrationists" fail to put forward any concrete alternative, thus revealing that their interest is not really protecting the integrity of the nation as it is protecting their own vested interests.

When programmes aimed at promoting social justice involving measures of nationalisation and land redistribution are put forward these are depicted as representing "foreign —isms", not suited to "our national genius" or our "religious values". It is a sorry spectacle to find columns upon columns being written to argue that Quaid-e-Azam or Allama Iqbal, when they used the word "socialism" did not really mean "socialism", or that "socialism", is a foreign idea and therefore, must be resisted. Those who oppose the structural and institutional changes, including nationalisation and land redistribution, aimed at promoting social justice must present their own positive proposals. Their palpable failure to do so shows that their resistance is not to "socialism" but to "social change", since it threatens their privileges.

The real polarisation today is between those who recognise that the constitutional, social, political and economic structure must be altered, in order to attain justice, and those who wish to preserve the present structure. The latter cannot afford to adopt a rational approach since by resort to reason they will be undone. They are, therefore, led by the compulsion of protecting their narrow interests, to rouse passions, to raise false bogeys, and to divert attention from the real issues. Among the former, however, reason alone can provide a guide towards an effective strategy for justice. There is, therefore, not only a basis but a need for these forces to reason together instead of working at cross-purposes.

It may be that such a dialogue may in some cases lead to an agreement to disagree, not as to the goals but as to methods and tactics. But a dialogue and an exploration of areas of possible co-operation and collaboration is vital in the confrontation between the forces of reason and the forces of reaction in our society, if we are to avoid the tragic result of finding the forces of reason divided in the face of a united, reactionary force.

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The views expressed by writers in these columns are not necessarily shared by the journal.

next saturday

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Private
vs.
Public Sector

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