BEYOND NATIONALISM

Fifteen years ago, in a swift move against local regional interests, the concept of West Pakistan as one administrative, economic and political unit became a reality. The history of One Unit and its impact on the smaller regions is too well known to need retelling. It is now no secret that the scheme was legislated only after some politicians were bought over with promises of shared power over a wider spectrum, while others who refused to be won over, were silenced by other means.

A creation of palace politics, One Unit has now expired by administrative fiat. Coming in the wake of the upsurge of nationalistic feeling. which resulted from the parochial policies of the Ayub Raj, the break-up of One Unit has conceded to the strength of these forces.

But the sources of power have only marginally been displaced. While the disintegration of One Unit has lessened the chances of exploitation of one province by another, it may do nothing to reduce the exploitation of one man by another. In practical terms this rearrangement of regional forces may mean little more than an extension of life for the prevailing power structure.

Punjab or no Punjab, rivers of honey are not likely to flow down these regions immediately, nor will the fruits of power descend yet to the people. For the leadership in most political parties of West Pakistan owes its loyalty to the tribal-feudal class, while the rank and file rarely goes beyond the middle-class.

The regional political parties have gained a lease of life due to their vociferous support of regional demands. Yet none of them has formulated any constructive plans for the social and economic development of their regions or for the proper filtering of the region's resources to the deprived classes of society. Nor for that matter has any party worked out the new inter-provincial relations. In the coming months these problems will crystallize, and will continue to bedevil the elected representatives.

While East Pakistan has cried itself hoarse over the misuse of its resources for development expenditure in West Pakistan, it remains a fact that within West Pakistan, vast areas in Sind, Baluchistan and the NWFP, have remained untouched by the development machinery. Following the administrative jugglery to set up four capitals, the logistical and accommodation problems by themselves seem to have tested the adaptability of our bureaucrats more serious attention will have to be paid to the inter-regional relationship. For the moment the Centre has pre-empted for itself the administration of those subjects that are of common concern to all the provinces. The final constitutional arrangement will have to be worked out later to the satisfaction of each region. As a concession to geography the four provinces will have to maintain mutual links with each other. But if justice is to prevail and what is more important if the independence of each nationality is to be genuinely affirmed, these relations must be worked out in such a manner that no region may ever again feel trampled upon by another region.

Before these principles can be affirmed, the political infra-structure will have to become more effective. It is hoped that once the frenzy of recrimination has passed, stock can be taken of the social structure of clan and tribal loyalties that impedes all change in West Pakistan.

Until this social structure can be visibly altered, political parties will continue to devote themselves verbally to the service of the people while they pursue the interests of the ruling classes. Theoretically, Sind, Sarhad and Baluchistan are as free as the Punjab to pursue their own development efforts, but how much of the results are likely to filter down to the deprived classes? No scion of a feudal family, or of a business house who finds himself in the political arena is likely to view with equanimity any legislation that many liberate the people from the economic and political control of these classes.

At present, dismemberment of One Unit may mean no more than the transfer or power from feudal-tribal groups of the Punjab to the feudal-oligarchies of each province but there is no reason to mourn the passing of One Unit or to pray for its exhumation. It is a tribute to the patience of the people, which, after years of suppression, broke out in the turbulence of 1969. Then they were united together under the banner of regional injustice. I, in the seventies, the provinces of West Pakistan are to move forward, the rising voice of the people will have to be recognized.

If West Pakistan's social structure is to take one giant leap from medieval to the modern times, they will have to chart a course of action to alter radically its outdated land tenure system, which perpetuates serfdom, and the state of the industrial labour. For these classes cannot continue to be deprived. The time span may be even shorter, but they will have to rise once again to see that justice prevails not only between region and region but between man and man.


Beyond Nationalism forum

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Vol. I, No. 33
4 July, 1970

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Published and printed by Dr. Kamal Hossain for Forum Publications Ltd., 3, Circuit House Row, Dacca 2, East Pakistan, at The East Pakistan Press (The National Publishers Ltd.), Bangshal Road, Dacca, East Pakistan.

this saturday

In next week's Forum the budget will be analysed in more detail.

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