

NOTE

Behind the Smoke Screen

Bharat Jhunjhunwala writes :

The people are made perpetually dependent on the government machinery in Man Mohan Singh's path of securing what they call social and economic welfare for the society. The patient has to provide bribe to the government doctor to provide the medicines. The common man becomes a meek 'seeker' from the government officers rather than a strong 'buyer' of services from the market. The attitude of subservience and dependence grows in him though he may get the health facilities. In order to draw benefit from the Employment Guarantee Scheme, the poor villager has to first have his name entered into the BPL list by the Pradhan. Then the Pradhan has to make a scheme while getting it approved by the District administration. Then the Village Secretary oversees the implementation of the programme. The people are relatively free in Gandhi's path. Gandhi had promoted Khadi so that the people got employment without being dependent upon the government. The expansion of freedom of the people by Employment Guarantee Schemes is like giving the prisoner the freedom to sleep or remain waking in his cell.

The path of Dr Man Mohan Singh actually seeks to enchain the people but mislead them into believing it to be freedom. First Dr Man Mohan Singh renders the people unemployed by giving freedom to large businesses to kill their cottage industries such as Coca Cola has killed the *rasvanti* and textile mills have killed handlooms. Then selected vocal elements among the people are co-opted by providing them with free facilities through government welfare programmes. The Block Pramukh is treated free in the government hospitals and his voice is muffled. The ordinary people remain helpless as previously-only they may imagine they too will get free treatment like obtained by the Block Pramukh.

It can be argued that people continue to be dependent upon the government in Gandhi's path as well. Jobs in handlooms and *rasvanti* are made only if the government imposes tax on the big businesses. But the nature of dependence in the two paths is qualitatively different. The people are dependent upon the government machinery at every step in Dr Man Mohan Singh's path such as having to produce a BPL ration card. This dependence on the government is less in Gandhi's path. The imposition of heavy tax at one critical point automatically leads to the generation of employment.

The role of the government is critical in both paths. The question is regarding its direction. Chief Economist of the International Monetary Fund Raghuram Rajan had studied the civil aviation industry in the United States. He found that the strict rules made by the regulatory authority enabled small companies to grow, intensified competition and led to the development of that industry. The role of the Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) in India has been similar in the telecommunication industry in India. Such regulatory function of the government stands on a qualitatively different footing than running government programmes through government departments. There was a long waiting list for telephones when that service was being departmentally provided by the government. Now phone connections are available on demand by private players. The role of government exists in both paths but the role is much less in the regulatory approach of Gandhi.

World view of Dr Man Mohan Singh is that of a retired bureaucrat. He looks at the world through the files put up by his subordinates. He cannot think outside the files. This will not do. Dr Singh's approach essentially empowers the bureaucracy behind the smokescreen of pro-people programmes. □□□