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On Other Pages

COMMENTS	2
VIEW FROM DELHI	
THE SOVIET ARM-TWIST	
FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT	5
"THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING"	
BY A CORRESPONDENT	7
NOT NEGOTIATIONS YET	
M. S. ARNONI	8
AFTER TURA, WHAT?	
ARUN KUMAR CHAKMA	10
A PUZZLING EMINENCE	12
CALCUTTA DIARY	
GYAN KAPUR	13
THE PRESS	
SEVERAL MALADIES	15
SHOUVANIK'S LATEST	
RUDRA PRASAD SEN GUPTA	17
TYRANTS OLD AND NEW	
MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY	17
LETTERS	18

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UP IN ARMS

MRS Gandhi's Government more than deserves the embarrassment it has been caused over the Soviet decision to supply arms to Pakistan. If its foreign policy postures have been made ridiculous, it can only blame its powers of self-deception and persistent efforts to deceive others. Yet, if the Government's reaction to the decision has been compounded of petulance and self-pity, the non-Communist Opposition's has been positively revolting. Led by the Jana Sangh, the latter has worked up an ugly hysteria. Elements of this hysterical agitation are characteristic of people who invariably try to make a virtue of their impotence. There are angry shrieks and loud bluster, but the breast-beating frenzy cannot quite drown the whining undertone which is the only reality in any Indian response to a reverse in international relations. People who can never think except in terms of begging from others start howling when their begging bowls are empty or others' are fuller. The bluster ceases as soon as they receive or are promised more.

This has not happened for the first time, nor is it likely to be the last. Ordinarily, therefore, the agitation could have been dismissed as just one more display of essentially servile response. But there are more disturbing possibilities in the present situation. Certain forces have already been trying to give a sinister turn to the feeling worked up. It is not for nothing that the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party have joined hands leading the protest movement, in spite of their different attitudes towards Pakistan. They have found common ground in opposition to India's ties, however tenuous, with the socialist world, however divided. The Soviet Union may no longer be the greatest inspiration for socialist and progressive forces, but it would be dangerous if resentment at Russian behaviour were to make Indian policies even more reactionary than they already are. And, in spite of the Swatantra Party's solicitude, in line with American prescriptions for the subcontinent, for an understanding with Pakistan as part of a plan to isolate China, there is considerable danger of an accentuation of communal feeling as a result of the Jana Sangh agitation against Pakistan's military build-up.

It is the reaction against socialist forces, indeed even against the so-called non-alignment in international affairs, that is most important, and the most alarming, a consummation for which both the Jana Sangh and

Moscow And Prague

the Swatantra Party are working. And in this effort they are being actively assisted by parties with socialist labels; indeed, the PSP has tried to outdo all others in shouting against the Soviet decision, which of course should not be surprising if one learns to regard this party as closer to the Swatantra ideology than any other in the country. And the SSP's appeal is to the heart of Hindi, and Hindu, chauvinism. The DMK, at least, has had the honesty to maintain that it is the Indian Government and not Russia that needs to be censured.

That New Delhi deserves to be censured should have been clear long ago. By its abject dependence on Washington and Moscow, it has deprived itself of virtually all options in international affairs, and this dependence cannot be discarded so long as hostile relations persist with India's two principal neighbours. From time to time, there is talk of settling with Pakistan, but none but the most gullible believe that it is any longer possible to make a deal with Pakistan in a bid to "contain" China. Even if it were, it would not reduce India's dependence, but would rather increase it. To be free from this dependence, the first task must be a search for an understanding with China. This is not to suggest that the search will be easy, or that India should align herself to what is called the Chinese camp. There is no more reason to depend on China than there is to depend on Russia or the USA, but if we want a really independent foreign policy it is essential to remove the need for dependence on any of these countries arising from our enmity with any other. Mrs Gandhi has talked of the need for self-reliance, but it is her Government's relations with Rawalpindi and Peking which make it necessary for the country to rely on others. Yet she goes on dismissing suggestions for a new approach to China with casual comment on the need for more congenial circumstances for a fresh initiative by New Delhi.

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The Soviet leadership has once again been caught on the wrong foot. After a sustained campaign over the months against the "new course" in Czechoslovakia it has come perilously close to showing its final trump card—the veiled threat to use force against the unrepentant Czechs.

The bourgeois Press cannot be blamed if it has exploited to the utmost the menacing tone of the communique issued by the five members of the Warsaw Pact. The Czech CP has been accused *in absentia* of conniving at the liberals' avowed programme of liquidating the "guiding role" of the Party and of introducing time-worn bourgeois patterns of multi-party democracy. The notorious article, "Two Thousand Words", written by some 69 Czech writers, artists and workers and reproduced simultaneously in several Prague newspapers, has provided ample ammunition to the Soviets. In effect the article called for the struggle to be carried forward to the districts and regions, and the removal of all those guilty men still holding on to the reins of power. Attacks on local State and party officials, strikes, demonstrations and boycotts, and even setting up of parallel bodies outside the framework of the ruling National Front—were some of the means advocated. In short, the article called for a sort of revolution, but neither the final objective nor the guiding ideology was spelled out at any length.

If the Soviet leaders have harped on these threats, most newsmen have forgotten that the Czech National Assembly had a tumultuous session precisely over this "Two Thousand Words" affair. As Masood Ali Khan reports in *New Age*, the entire leadership repudiated practically every word of the article. Most of them denounced it as a call for counter-revolution. That, however, was not enough for the Soviets: the latter would not feel happy until these "counter-revolutionaries" are hauled up in jail.

On top of it, the Soviet Press has publicized the discovery of arms-caches in western parts of the country near

the West German borders. To the outside world this sounds ominously like a CIA-type accusation and hence few are willing to put any credence.

For the moment the chances of an immediate crisis seem to have receded as the Soviet leaders have agreed to meet the Czechs inside the latter's territory. Many Soviet troops and armoured cars have apparently left Czechoslovakia in the last few days. But can the danger of a Soviet intervention be ruled out altogether?

Indeed, the Czechs do not seem prepared for any bloody confrontation either. The new course in that country may well be superior in most ways to the neo-Stalinist regime under Novotny. But the motive forces behind the change were primarily the intellectuals; unlike their counterparts in France, they had no great ideology that could create a common front with the workers and thus pave the way for a genuine workers' democracy. Almost the sole grievance of these intellectuals was the lack of freedom and of affluence enjoyed by their Western counterparts. True, the Central Committee of the CP had passed a resolution in June creating workers' councils in factories. But in the prevailing mood of the country these could quickly degenerate into their Yugoslav prototypes where the managerial cadres get all the privileges under the sun with the due authorization of the workers councils! If this analysis is correct, the Czech leadership would have to fall back upon unalloyed nationalism to defend itself against Soviet intervention. Hence Titoism seems destined to find another ally in the not-too-distant future.

On the other hand, the Czech old guard are not a spent force altogether. Should the Soviet Union want it, a puppet regime can yet be put up. There are still doubts as to whether the Russians would really repeat another Hungary. For the moment, Messrs Brezhnev & Co are greatly perturbed over the possible repercussion of the Czech experiment on the USSR, Poland and East Germany where the intelligentsia is already very restless;

JULY 27, 1968

this factor alone may explain to a considerable extent the current Soviet stance. But then the Russians can hardly afford to ignore completely the pleas put forward by the French and Italian parties; not only will these suffer political setbacks in their own countries but the Russian image also is bound to be impaired.

The final outcome is by all accounts

quite uncertain. Whatever it is, it is unlikely to bring any comfort to the radical forces in the world at large. The NATO Powers have indeed shown "admirable restraint" in their public utterances for, they alone can chuckle in pure delight with the certain knowledge that heads they win, tails they don't lose.

An Uninspiring Document

The 32-point programme of the United Front is a document of compromise. It had to be to accommodate the conflicting class interests represented on the Front. The polarisation of political forces in the State is yet to be, in spite of all claims to the contrary. In fact, it would seem that the process has received a setback since last year's general election, for the residual parties of the Congress, who have hardly any difference from their parent body except on trivial and transitory issues, have flocked now with the Left. Opinion will perhaps differ on who is influencing who, but the rigorous limits that the so-called minimum programme has set to the government that the UF hopes to form after the mid-term election eliminate the possibilities of any non-conformist policy that parties more sensitive to the mood and need of the people may desire. The minimum is actually the maximum, for the programme obviously represents the highest common measure of agreement between the UF parties. However forward-looking the manifestos of these parties might be, individual party documents have been superseded by the elaborate evasion of the common programme.

It has been stated that last year's 18-point programme of the UF is still valid; the new programme has only concretised it and removed some of the vague generalities. The 18-point programme, as worked by the UF Government in its nine-month regime, is not something on which the people can be spoony. But the generalities were its forte. They permitted a variety of interpretations not all of them universally palatable; they

provided scope for manoeuvre, for moving in desirable directions on the testimony of the programme despite the deadweight of the diehards in the Front. The hidebound programme that the UF has evolved, now in great detail and after months of deliberation, will not permit any such departure from the path of collective expediency. It has sought to set at rest yesterday's controversy over the legal and the legitimate, forgetting that all appurtenances of an exploitative system are illegal and that the basic legitimacies can never be legal so long as that system operates. It seems the UF Government will permit only what is legal, and everything beyond that will have to wait till the laws have been amended to give legitimate action the respectability of parliamentary legality. That is why the UF, has promised to amend some of the existing legislation on land reforms and labour relations; in the meantime, peasants and workers may comfort themselves with the thought that the UF has been re-installed in office and keep off "adventurist" tactics.

The lengthy preamble to the programme is in effect an apologia of the UF's unbrilliant record last year. Whether the UF Government would have been able to put up a more presentable balance-sheet if the task of keeping itself united and, as a corollary, in power did not prove so exhausting is perhaps a controversial question. But the UF itself has grudgingly admitted that there were certain weaknesses, vacillations, and differences within the Front as also some treacherous elements linked with vested interests and the Congress party.

The external limitations, like the Constitution and the Congress Government at the Centre, persist. The UF, in the circumstances, could claim to be in a better shape to live up to the expectation of the people if it was sure of no corrosion within. The absolute irrelevance of the pledge in the programme to do everything to preserve and strengthen the sovereignty of the country will, however, raise misgivings. It seems some of the parties in the UF remain suspect in the eyes of the rest, and no plenum decisions or ideological documents can make them acceptable without reservation; nor their endorsement of the laconic pledge in the programme. The Congress will no doubt work on this chink as it did before, assiduously and unitedly, despite its seeming internal differences over profits of office, immediate or potential. The programme is a patchwork quilt which will have served its purpose with a UF victory; the UF Government will have to prove itself a much more effective tool of the will and daring of the people than what some of its constituent parties have allowed to be indicated in the common programme.

A Challenge ?

We could have danced all night, there is exhilarating news from Washington, D. C. The American House of Representatives has chopped down this year's foreign aid appropriations to less than \$2 billion; the Development Loan Fund, out of which New Delhi's needs are to be met, has been slashed to \$450 million. There are at least a dozen countries lined up to share the booty of the DLF. So, even with a miracle, India's share cannot exceed \$200 million. As the Americans give less, the rest of the Western nations will make a corresponding contraction in their generosity. All told, the Government of India henchmen will be lucky to get even \$350 million for the year from all sources. Compared to the \$1.3 billion which the Aid India Consortium had recommended earlier, and the sort of doles India was being hand-

ed down a few years ago, this is a puny sum. Vietnam is coming to roost at least somewhere.

Those who live by aid die from the deprivation of it. Gloom has settled on New Delhi; all the well-laid plans of the Desais and the Mehtas are reduced to a shambles at one stroke. But New Delhi's gloom should be the nation's salvation. When the World Bank led the policywallahs in New Delhi up the devaluation path, there was much promise of an augmented flow of aid provided we agreed to dismantle controls and liberalise imports. The Government of India—each member of the Union Cabinet, the Prime Minister included, vying with the rest—sank to the lowest depths to propitiate the Bank: the rupee was devalued, exchange regulations were relaxed, the Plan was scuttled, the domestic controls on the production and distribution of key commodities were gradually dismantled, private enterprise was issued a *carte blanche* to maul and mulct the economy. A demoralized non-government did all this, but it thought the *quid pro quo* would be a flush of aid funds.

The factor of Vietnam was not taken into account, nor did the decrepit lot in New Delhi consider it relevant to make allowance for the growing domestic disenchantment in the United States. The gleam in their eyes has now gone out. There are people who cannot work any sum unless the availability of aid is first assured them; for them, to keep the economy going and developing is an exclusive function of permanent external dependence. They now are at a loss because they did not learn any other arithmetic; nor did they think that the necessity for an alternative arithmetic would ever arise.

And yet, with a modicum of faith and courage, the diminution of American aid could be the turning point in our economic endeavours. The reduction voted in the U.S. Congress would perhaps imply, when the various elements have been added together, a loss of foreign exchange equivalent to 3 per cent of the national income. This is salvageable, provided

we agree on the agenda of what needs to be done. A pruning of defence expenditure, straightaway at least by a quarter, will release some foreign exchange for the vital sectors of growth. The present trend toward import liberalisation, which has in practice meant donating precious foreign exchange worth at least Rs. 100 crores annually for the edification of private manufacturers, traders and consumers in the upper income brackets, has to be reversed. Industrial units have to be set compulsory export quotas, and no nonsense about special subsidies—as it is, they already pile huge profits by fleecing the buyers at home. The kulaks, lush with money from this year's bumper crop, have to be taxed—and at stiff rates; taxing them will both curtail their purchases of luxury goods with high import content and contribute to the raising of funds with which to import fertilisers and machinery for sustaining the progress in agriculture.

No, the difficulty lies not in the lack of a meaningful programme of

action for conserving and augmenting foreign exchange, it is in the class character of the men who decide things in New Delhi. Each of the above suggestions, if translated into action, will hurt some interests with which they are connected. That simply is not permissible. First things must come first, and the first things consist in maintaining the status quo ante of the rulers and their near and dear ones. But since foreign aid has been cut, certain things have still got to give; for example, projects for strengthening the industrial base of the country and for hastening the process of import substitution. Perhaps the Planning Commission had already anticipated the shape of coming events, and ordained that no new industrial projects in the public sector will be taken up during the year. But at least there is this satisfaction: by shutting out fresh projects and thus stultifying growth, the men in New Delhi are merely hastening the process of disintegration of the economy. History is going to overtake them.

Starving Biafra

Alarming reports continue to come out of besieged Biafra. About 3.5 million people, most of them women and children, are starving, and nearly 3,000 children are said to be dying every day. Some 600,000 more who are in the bush to escape the liberating Nigerian army are in no better condition. Not all the sufferers are Ibos. The population of the Eastern Region of Nigeria is 12 million which includes five million non-Ibos, and the influx since 1966 has meant many more mouths to feed. Even in normal times, relief would have been a tremendously difficult task. Now it is staggering, in view of the siege, the hostilities, bad roads and the onset of the rains. And what makes things tragic beyond words is the deadlock over urgent supplies of foodstuffs and medicines for the starving and the sick.

Biafra does not want the supplies to come overland under Nigerian supervision along "mercy corridors"

because of the fear that these may turn out to be corridors of military power and the food may be poisoned. Col. Ojukwu is a proud man who refuses to give in even to a British offer of aid—hasn't Whitehall been the principal vendor of arms to Lagos? The Nigerians, on their part, think relief supplies by air may be diverted to clandestine traffic in arms and amount to an admission of the separate status Biafra claims for itself.

Why the Nigerian Federation faces a challenge is well known by now. The cracks were there from the very beginning. In May 1966 about 3,000 Biafrans were massacred; the military coup of July 29, 1966, led to killing of many Biafran servicemen. Then came the big massacre—of at least 30,000 people—in September-October. The secession of Biafra, when it came last year, should have caused no surprise in Lagos.

The theory is advanced, both in

JULY 27, 1968

Lagos, and in London by the Wilson Government, that Biafra is a test case: if the secession is accepted, Black Africa would see an outbreak of tribalism. The argument did not convince the four black African States that have recognised Biafra. The Biafrans wanted autonomous regions with a weak centre and not a total break-up. Even after the massacre of May 1966, Col Ajukwu had declared: "it must, therefore, be our prayer that the innocent blood thus shed will be accepted as the supreme purchase price for the solid and everlasting unity of this country." But the Nigerians, like the successors of British regimes elsewhere, are keen on a powerful federal government. Besides, there are the rich oil reserves in the Eastern Region and the land there is rich. They also profess concern about the rights of the non-Ibos living in the region and point to the invasion of the Mid-West at the earlier stage of the war. Whether the Federal concept will survive a murderous campaign in which 100,000 have died so far and the living have been forced to a diet of rats, lizards and sausage-flies is another matter. This is a high price, but it seems the Biafrans are prepared to withdraw into the countryside and carry on guerilla warfare.

The peace talks at Kampala broke up because the capture of Port Hartcourt made the Nigerians think that a military solution was at hand. The talks to open in Addis Ababa, at the persuasion of the Organisation of African Unity, will be protracted and painful. One welcome feature is that the agenda will include the question of relief to civilian victims of the fighting. As time is running out for the starving and the sick, the sooner relief is allowed to reach Biafra the better. The angry concern for the starving Biafrans now being voiced in certain London journals is of course legitimate, but it sounds a bit phoney when one remembers their callousness towards the American inhumanities in Vietnam.

JULY 27, 1968

View from Delhi

The Soviet Arm-Twist

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

THE image-conscious Prime Minister's brave public stance aside, is her Government really firm or restrained over the Soviet arms sale to Pakistan? On the eve of the monsoon session of Parliament, with the non-Communist opposition set to ambush the Government on this issue, all you see is the wringing of hands on how badly the Soviets have let Little Red Riding Hood down. And it is solemnly suggested that there should be no recrimination, which incidentally implies there should be no post-mortem into what has gone wrong. After a busy weekend of public relationing by the Prime Minister (with her own partymen, the Opposition leaders, editors of the Capital's Big Six newspapers, and then the New Delhi bureau chiefs of newspapers which can get round, in that order), nothing seems to have gone wrong. Then what was all the wailing about?

On the eve of President Zakir Husain's Moscow visit, it suited those who ran the Government to build up indignation against the Soviet decision. Perhaps this was meant to pressurise Moscow into retracting a little. If the Government knew that the Soviet attitude was changing, as is claimed now, little was done to counter the trend. The game recoiled and along with the anti-Soviet sentiment, a move against the Prime Minister was gaining strength in the party, with the help of the campaign outside by the non-Communist opposition parties. So the Government's main worry is how to soft-pedal it now.

The Prime Minister has been over-worked these days, what with the need to play up what is supposed to be an act of Soviet perfidy and then to play it down and give the country the impression that the Government is firm and restrained.

Back in 1954, when the U.S. arms aid to Pakistan created a tense situa-

tion in the country, Mr Nehru could denounce the aid as "an unfriendly act." In a cold war situation, non-alignment gave the country practising it a series of options and a certain manoeuvrability. Mrs Gandhi's cold feet now is a measure of non-alignment's irrelevance where Super-Power interests converge.

At her hush-hush "debriefing" of select super-correspondents on Thursday (July 18), she was asked if the Government would denounce the Soviet decision as an unfriendly act. Mrs Gandhi replied that if that was done they would have to sever diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union the next day. She wouldn't call it an unfriendly act. On Friday, speaking to another batch of correspondents (carefully chosen), she admitted that the Government had no direct information about the Soviet decision. But from the reports it got it appeared that the supplies to Pakistan would be very small and the situation was not so serious as to warrant an open denunciation. If so, what was the meaning of her first statements at Gauhati and Calcutta?

Earlier on Wednesday, the Prime Minister told the Delhi editors that the Government was not going to revise its policy. The fact is, the Government has no policy towards the Super-Powers and the question of changing it hardly arises. The Government's thinking is reduced to the level of platitudes and nobody knows what its statements mean.

And what of the story planted by Indian officials from Moscow? A news agency man accompanying the President put out the story that the Soviet Union has told us that it has secured an assurance from Pakistan that the arms would not be used against India. No assurance was in fact sought and no assurance was in fact given. What the Government tries to sell for public

consumption is vastly different from what the Prime Minister has been telling those called in for the debriefing sessions. The Press is supposed to take the cue and if in the coming week the Government and the Prime Minister get a mauling in Parliament, enough care is expected to be taken by the news media to project the "right" image of Mrs Gandhi.

The Prime Minister seems to believe that the Soviet stand on Kashmir has not changed. But everyone else knows it has. In the past, New Delhi took Soviet support to India for granted. And this was the impression it had sought to promote. Now when a qualitative change comes over Soviet policy, the Government finds itself in a jam. The party alignment on the eve of the monsoon session is interesting. The two Communist parties have taken upon themselves the role of defending the Prime Minister's position in the Congress party amidst a crash campaign by her factional rivals to isolate her on this issue. Moscow-lining correspondents have been given the directive to write about an attempt by the Rightists to "embarrass" the Prime Minister. If Mrs Gandhi goes, the election of a new leader should be the concern of the Congress Parliamentary Party and not the CPI's or the CPI(M)'s. Dissociation with the right wing's anti-Soviet campaign is one thing. But to assume for themselves the chivalrous role of propping up the Prime Minister or defending the Soviet decision is in the least ridiculous.

Another interesting factor is the tone of the PSP's reaction to the Soviet arms decision. Mr Nath Pai's resolution is the mildest one the Opposition could have thought of. The PSP seems to have given up its old anti-Sovietism and Moscow has been wooing it for a long time. The Soviet bloc countries have also been displaying undue solicitude for the SSP (which incidentally has a finger in the Sofia pie). The CIA once backed the non-Communist left against the Communist left all over. But now Moscow is trying to support the non-Communist "left" against the extreme Communist left.

Dialogue with China

The Prime Minister might yet head off a party crisis and even come to terms with the rightist parties. The lobbying in New Delhi now is to turn to the West for arms aid. The Moscow lobby is very nervy these days and seems to be worried that Mrs Gandhi might after all launch a dialogue with China. The theorisation is that even reactionaries are demanding a dialogue with China so that New Delhi would be rebuffed by Peking and perforce turn to Washington for arms aid! It is indeed extraordinary that the Moscow lobby has invented this kind of thinking, forgetting for the moment that it contradicts something else it has been peddling. If Mrs Gandhi has been anxious to resume a dialogue with China and the rightist pressure has deterred her from it so far, it also follows that under stepped up rightist pressure she would never think of resuming any dialogue with China. The fact is neither Moscow nor Washington wants any New Delhi-Peking dialogue. Even the CPI is not very enthusiastic about it and the effort is to forewarn Mrs Gandhi that she is in for a severe rebuff from Peking.

A point of incidental interest here is the CPI-CPI(M) detente forced by the West Bengal mid-term elections. This has resulted in a moratorium on mutual recriminations in Kerala. The possibility of the Kerala alliance breaking up after the West Bengal elections cannot be ruled out, unless there is a renewed detente forced by factors like Moscow's pressure on both the parties. Marxist leaders have gone on record to say that, had they not expelled some of the ultras, their party would have been banned. What a confession to make! The leadership seemed to know who should be expelled and when to save the party's legality. Some dialectics, indeed. One would not be surprised if Moscow's pet theory of "unity in action" finds its real beginning in India's Parliament.

Youth Festival

Is the Sofia junket off or on? From a jumbo-jet-size delegation, (400), it shrank to a mere Boeing size (100)

and after that the External Affairs Ministry told the leaders that even 100 cannot be allowed because the Youth Congress was not in the racket any more. The threat of keeping off the festival, held out through a flamboyant Press statement, was following by cringing and crawling before the officials and it looks like it would be 80, after all. But selections had been made on the assumption it would be 100 and now they are fighting like Kilkenny cats over who should be dropped. There is a sidelight to the whole drama. It was understood earlier that all the delegates had to do was to find the air fare to Tashkent and the Socialist Fatherland would take care of the rest, transporting them by rail to Sofia. But now the delegates have been told to find the train fare too, which is clumsy business and a great Socialist let-down of the broad Indian masses whom the delegates represent.

The delegates have been camping in New Delhi waiting for the take-off to Tashkent but now everything is in such a mess. Not, however, for the professional youth leaders who have managed individual invitations and are poised for a take-off, delegation or no delegation. The Youth Congress is out of it because even the Prime Minister ditched them, with her participation in the local mela organised by the sarkari Communist-sponsored Preparatory Committee.

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NOTICE

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"The Russians Are Coming"

By A CORRESPONDENT

RUSSIAN diplomatic voyages to the third world nowadays do not produce that hysterical reaction in the Western Press to which one was used only a few years back. Even the visit of Khrushchev, the apostle of peaceful co-existence, to Asian countries in 1963 threw the Western Press into wild speculation as to the motive of the buffoonish Premier. But the days have changed. Nothing could demonstrate this more dramatically than Western reaction to Alexei Kosygin's Asian safari in April. The possibility of growing Russian influence in Asia is now viewed as mildly embarrassing but nonetheless a welcome development as a deterrent against wars of national liberation inspired by Mao's thought.

Jay B. Sorenson, an Associate of the Harvard Russian Research Centre writing in the Hongkong weekly *Far Eastern Economic Review* thinks that these endeavours of Russia represent a quiet but determined effort to establish herself as a global power in a part of the world where her influence has been marginal since World War II. With its large potential market Asia is regarded by Russia as more important than Latin America and even the Middle East. And operating on a broad spectrum of possibilities, Russia has relied upon economic arrangements, diplomacy, and some show of military strength to secure her objectives. Priority is still assigned to the development of her economy; all agreements have to fit into her scheme of things. Thus bilateral trade is preferred to aid, though aid and technical assistance are offered as political opportunities arise.

In approaching "non-aligned" or pro-Western nations in South-East Asia, Mr. Sorenson notes, the Russians have been pursuing political objectives. They have been willing to import more than they export and to make some purchases at prices slightly above market value. Last year saw a real breakthrough in relations with Malaysia

and Singapore. Trade agreements were signed and diplomatic relations entered into. Russia is now encouraging the East European Bloc countries to do the same. Two years ago, when Russia was backing Indonesia and calling Malaysia an "imperialist" fabrication, such a breakthrough was inconceivable, but now Mr. Sorenson states with satisfaction, the Soviet Union is the largest single importer of Malaysian rubber.

After describing the trade success of the Soviet Union with countries like Pakistan, Ceylon and Singapore, he points out that the Russians have not been getting as much success with the anti-communist Philippines, but a change appears to be in the offing. The Soviet Union wants trade and diplomatic relations. Until now she has had to settle for trade delegation visits, such as an unofficial trade mission last year led by the President of the Philippine Chamber of Industries and other trade groups. The Russians are hoping that the Philippine's internal political and economic difficulties, the fear of an American withdrawal after Vietnam, and reappearance of China will produce the desired results. One knowledgeable source reports that Russia is boasting that diplomatic relations will be established next year.

Nor in Indonesia have the Russians fared well lately. Indonesia's rapprochement with the West, the official ban on Marxism, and the destruction of the Communist Party, have led to some strain in relations and an exchange of harsh words in the Soviet and the Indonesian Press. Russia has, however, refrained from jeopardising relations, and as a bellweather indicator of her strategy, has agreed to reschedule loans. Economic and political relations will probably hover on a low level for some time, but fear of China makes it expedient to avoid a breakdown in relations.

Low Priority

Russian support of insurgency

movements outside of the Vietcong is low on their priority scale. The position could change, but right now wars of liberation outside of China promise few dividends. To Cambodia and Burma, as their relations with China deteriorate, the Soviet Union has offered its friendship. One month after the Burmese break with Peking Kosygin pledged Soviet support and sent a high-level economic mission to give aid and help stabilise the economy. The Russians have also signed a cultural exchange agreement, and have encouraged Burma to look to East Europe. A Soviet ambassador is reported to have called the Burmese rebels not revolutionaries but "bandits". Like the US, the Soviet Union at this moment is interested in containing Maoist wars of liberation.

The Soviet military presence is more ubiquitous. Russia is looking to the sea to wield global power. The Soviet navy now regularly manoeuvres in the Western Pacific, formerly regarded as a "US lake". One present Soviet naval problem is a lack of refuelling and supply bases. Apparently Admiral Gorshkov's February visit to India and the April goodwill visit were in the hope of securing these privileges. India's instant denial of having granted these rights does not dispel the long-term significance of the occasion.

On the basis of studies observers make some interesting forecasts. Continued Russian headway will serve to narrow China's freedom of action, but it will also serve as an irritant exacerbating the already strained relations. Since the Soviet Union at present rates diplomatic relations with existing Asian states above insurrection, since it is opposed to any war or change in the area that would jeopardise Soviet gains or upset its domestic and international priorities, Leftwing revolutionaries in the area will probably have to look to China for support. Though the Soviet Union competes with the USA for a hold on Asia, "the U.S. and the Soviet Union now have a coincident policy in containing China in Asia."

Newsweek in a report headlined "The Russians are coming" (Mr. Sorenson's article had the same

title) dilated on the same theme. *Newsweek*, however, emphasised the political import of the current Soviet efforts and with a candour that would cause the admirers of the Kremlin to blush. Over the past few years, the report says, without fuss or fanfare, the Russians have been determinedly seeking to expand their influence throughout South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. And now, with all British military forces save the Hongkong garrison scheduled to leave Asia by 1971, the Soviet drive east of Suez is stepping up.

"The primary purpose of the Soviet effort in Asia is presumably to counter the influence of Communist China. In any case, much of that effort has been military. The Soviet Pacific fleet, with more than 100 submarines, 50 destroyers and destroyer escorts and some 250 shore-based navy planes, now regularly manoeuvres in the western Pacific, once regarded as a "U.S. lake".

"At the same time, the Russians are also making an energetic attempt to win friends among the "neutral" nations of Asia. Gone are the days when Moscow supported local Communist movements in their attempts to overthrow Asian governments by force. Now, while Peking-backed Communists are in the field against the Governments of Cambodia and Burma the Russians are sending significant amounts of aid to both countries. And in Laos, they have scrupulously refrained from interfering with the efforts of the U.S.-backed government of Souvanna Phouma to fend off the Communist-led Pathet Lao."

The *Newsweek* report relates growing Russian trade with the "pro-Western" countries of the area and significantly includes India among them. Along with this economic activity, the Soviets have been busily strengthening their diplomatic network in the area. In the past year, they have set up new embassies in Malaysia and Singapore, both of which have strongly anti-Communist governments. And so correct has the Soviet diplomatic behaviour been that even the Philip- pines, one of the most outspoken

anti-Communist nations in the world, is said to be considering the establishment of relations with Moscow.

What this expansion of Soviet influence will ultimately mean for the U.S. is, as the report says, still uncertain. Quite conceivably if the U.S. were to withdraw its troops from Vietnam, Moscow might bid for an even larger role in South-East Asia. But this is a prospect which appears to leave many U.S. diplomats supremely unconcerned. In the foreseeable future, they contend, Russia simply will not have the power, prestige or

money to replace the U.S. as the major outside power there.

The more important cause of this "supreme unconcern" lies in the possible Soviet role in containing China for the U.S. A U.S. official, as quoted in the *Newsweek* report, said, "The major battle force in Asia is China. And the Russians can be a counterweight to the Chinese along with us. They can help us promote stability in the area. They may make life more complex for us, but I hardly think they are going to make it more dangerous."

Not Yet Negotiations

M. S. ARNONI

FOR years international pressure was being brought upon the United States to consent to a negotiated settlement of the Vietnamese war. Up until April 7, 1965, the very term "negotiations" was stigmatized by U.S. officials as connoting lack of patriotism and subversion. Then, in a seeming about-face, came President Johnson's famous Baltimore speech in which "unconditional negotiations" became the slogan, concealing conditions which in effect made any "negotiations" subject to the Liberation Front's prior surrender and North Vietnam's acquiescence in it.

Among those who have demanded of the United States to negotiate in good faith were scores of foreign governments, including those of U.S.-allied countries, a preponderance of world public opinion and of the world press, distinguished personalities, including U Thant and Pope Paul VI, and tens of millions of Americans. But the U.S. administration stubbornly resisted all these pressures, single-mindedly pursuing military victory while, as usual, camouflaging its brutal philosophy in the best products of its psychological warfare specialists.

That was the situation up until March 31, when President Johnson dramatically announced curbs of U.S. bombings of North Vietnam as an in-

ducement to get negotiations underway. The new U.S. position, coming after years of cynical contempt for domestic and international public opinion, had an electrifying effect everywhere. Only a war's end is accompanied by more jubilant relief than that which followed the United States-North Vietnamese consent to engage in preliminary negotiations.

The credibility of the American change of heart was fostered by the military situation in Vietnam. Ever since the NLF's Tet offensive the universal assumption that the Americans could not be militarily defeated has been shown up as folly. Certainly neither the NLF nor the North Vietnamese could force the Americans surrender unconditionally, but if Vietnam's victory is to be construed as a situation in which continued U.S. military initiative could be undertaken only at a cost politically and/or economically unacceptable to the United States, then the NLF and the North Vietnamese have in fact scored it.

Old Ends: New Means

But no sooner had the negotiations in Paris begun than it became clear that they were not going to be what those demanding them for years had hoped. Although the very appearance of a U.S. delegation in a conference

JULY 27, 1968

room together with the North Vietnamese must be humiliating to its aggressor mentality, the proud world policeman having to accept the "little gooks" across the table as on a par, Mr Harriman has not come to extract the best possible terms for a U.S. withdrawal. Rather, Paris saw a new front opened where U.S. predominance at least in a part of Vietnam will continue to be pursued. From now on diplomacy will be used by the United States as an extension of warfare by other means.

In all this the military reality proved decisive: so long as the United States could hope for a favourable military solution, it would not hear of negotiations, occasionally making semantic but not substantive concessions; as soon, however, as its military situation became quite untenable, it forfeited the exclusiveness of its military reliance. The United States fights when it can, and talks when it must.

An updating and U.S. ratification of the Geneva Agreement of 1954, if such were the U.S. inclination, could be accomplished in American-Vietnamese negotiations lasting no more than a single day. But the U.S. government is not even now willing to accept such a solution. Harriman's statement of May 15 that "We have never been for a coalition government and we will never be for a coalition government," automatically precluding even farther-reaching concessions that may be indispensable for a peaceful settlement, may not exhaust the U.S. position, but it stems from an assessment that the situation does not yet compel immediate American concessions of substance. Rather time is relied on to produce favourable opportunities for extracting the maximum from the other side. A combination of sly diplomacy and at least some future successes on the battlefields is relied on to soften the Vietnamese. The most immediate American purpose in starting the negotiations seems to have been a desire to gain time and respite from increasingly unbearable NLF military pressure.

In the meantime, as diplomatically needed good news from the fronts fails

to reach the U.S. delegation in Paris, verbal substitutes are made to do. A succession of empty claims of military victory began even before the preliminary negotiations. The lifting of the siege of the U.S. base at Khe Sanh by the liberation forces was self-evidently a voluntary political move on their part, yet U.S. officials were no more embarrassed to claim military victory than they had been when denying the effectiveness of the NLF's Tet offensive. The renewed NLF offensive, particularly in Saigon, immediately before and at the beginning of the Paris talks was similarly characterised as a failure.

Even as the United States is attempting to cover the windows of the Paris conference room with illusionary paintings of its battlefield victories, one hardly needs to go beyond the American press and U.S. officials to encounter accidentally more objective war reports. "Allied officers feel that the threat of enemy action is greater than ever," writes an American correspondent from Vietnam. (*The New York Times*, May 18.) The North Vietnamese have attacked the cities and military installations in the northern region with rockets and mortar shells and have engaged in a series of sharp battles around the old imperial city of Hue and Dong Ha, a major military center that serves as a supply depot for the defenses along the demilitarized zone." (*Ibid.*) Maj. Gen. Rathvon McClure Tompkins, commander of the U.S. 3rd Marine Division, is reported in the same dispatch as foreseeing "a succession of sharp, bloody fighting ranging all the way from squad-size ambushes to multi-battalion operations." While Washington pretends to be jubilant, another quoted Marine officer was down to earth: "We are in a dangerous period." The report continues:

Whatever the case, the allies have no doubt that the North Vietnamese still have the capability of striking with great force. Senior American military officers calculate that the North Vietnamese could mount a major attack on any of the outposts along the demilitarized zone....

Further, the officers concede that the enemy can penetrate any city or installation if he is prepared to sacrifice great numbers of men. (*Ibid.*)

As for the Americans' own much heralded "Operation Delaware" offensive in the A Shau Valley, not only has one "high-ranking American officer" conceded that "the fighting had 'not been what we expected'", but after a month's time it came to an end, with the U.S. military, instead of claiming success, shy "to say whether United States and South Vietnamese troops had left the valley or were remaining in an effort to block enemy supply routes." (*Ibid.*) Soon Associated Press would report from Da Nang that "highly informed sources said today that there was 'quite a bit of evidence' that the North Vietnamese had moved back into the A Shau Valley with large forces."

Price for Talking

Verbal substitutes for military victory have never yet decided the outcome of a war; they will not decide the Vietnam war either. They may be of passing propaganda value, but they have no potential of manoeuvring the NLF and North Vietnamese to negotiate away what the United States has failed to fight away from them. Their resistance to words is not likely to be inferior to their resistance to napalm.

However, the United States does have reason to assume that its mere promise of meeting the North Vietnamese representatives sufficed to extract at least one military concession—the initial lifting of the Khe Sanh siege. This encourages it to continue playing its prima donna role of having to be bribed into continuing the talks. At least its temporary public position is that a cessation of bombing of North Vietnam is conditional on a cessation, or diminution, of Northern aid to the NLF's uprising in behalf of the 1954 Geneva Agreement and to acceptance of the South's permanent severance from Vietnam so that it can serve as an American base on China's periphery. This is all the war has been about, and even the Americans themselves, are fully aware

After Tura, What ?

ARUN KUMAR CHAKMA

that their military failure to achieve this objective cannot be crowned with diplomatic success. They nonetheless continue to raise the impossible maximum demands hoping that the resulting procrastination would postpone any final negotiations to a militarily more favourable time. But in the obvious absence of any prospect of extracting, through diplomacy, a strategic victory, the Americans will nonetheless keep trying to gain at least tactical military concessions "in return" for talking and eventually a phased lifting of the talks to the status of real negotiations. They will leave no word combination unused or untwisted to claim additional victories, the self-advertised mightiest world power trying to collect into its diplomatic bag whatever military crumbs may be available from its Vietnamese opponents.

It is likely that not even in Washington is there anyone who knows what will come of all this. How long will the negotiations last? What terms will prove acceptable to the Americans? When and in what stages will they compromise their maximum demands?

Real negotiations are not yet underway. What has emerged in Paris is an American-Vietnamese forum that may, at some future date, be called upon to fulfil a diplomatic assignment. In the meantime, score is kept of each side's changing assets and military arguments, while at the same time much counterfeit is put into circulation.

While the Americans are pretending in Paris that they must be bribed by their adversary into continued talks, the truth of the matter is that their presence in the conference room reflects nothing but a lack of choice. As for real negotiations, they can begin only when the United States accepts the premise that Vietnam belongs to the Vietnamese, and that not the Vietnamese but the Americans are the ones who will have to leave any and all parts of that country.

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THE recent week-long plenary session of the APHLC in Tura has ended, strictly speaking, in confusion and chaos. Confusion, because it has not been able to generate any hope even among those who believe in negotiations; chaos, because the hill leaders have not been able to arrive at any policy-decision on the future course of action. And the session, which appeared to be no better than a futile exercise in political name-calling, reflects an apparent resolve on the part of the hill leaders to provide both the Assam Government and the Centre with reasons to feel more comfortable than ever before—a fact which has, quite understandably, prompted certain quarters to talk glibly about the 'great victory' the hill leaders have achieved over the 'extremists'.

No doubt it was the force of circumstances that led the prominent members of the APHLC to sit in a conference. They met, not because they felt they had to discuss the situation arising out of the Centre's apathy towards the reorganisation scheme, but because they felt it necessary to assess the extent of loyalty of the hill people that they still enjoy. And they had a very hard time pacifying a large section of the delegates who were for launching immediately the proposed non-violent direct action.

The conference started in an atmosphere fraught with despair and anger and almost everybody seemed poised for an outburst. At one stage, when a section of the hill leaders rose to explain the desirability of allowing the Centre more time to honour its 'commitments', some young delegates were heard accusing them of being guilty of "unwisely altering their political perceptions, which was not consistent with the basis of hill politics". What the dissenters meant was that their leaders had dishonoured their early commitments on the next phase of the programme, according to which they were to intensify their movement if

their demands were not fulfilled. The dissenters were no longer willing to allow the leaders more time to waste in 'hobnobbing' with the Centre. In their view, the Centre has drastically twisted its original stand and now it is quite unwilling to commit anything whatsoever. They have come to believe that it is no use waiting for Godot, that an intensified non-violent direct action is the only answer to the Centre's 'inimical attitude' towards them.

Not that the members of the APHLC do not want an intensified movement. But they have so far tried, with success, to dispense with it in the hope that their 'optimism' would yield results. And at the Tura conference, too, they asked the delegates to be receptive to their optimism. The dissenters argued that they were no longer that unsophisticated—they have become much more conscious than they were five years back. They insisted that their idea of 'intensified movement' did not mean violence, but some sophisticated, democratic means to achieve their objectives. But the predicament of the present leadership is understandable. On the one hand, they have not the courage to act in defiance of the Centre's stern warning not to resort to any precipitate action and on the other, they are not too sure that the proposed non-violent direct action will not turn into violence as a result of provocation from the anti-reorganisation activists. This was a point they repeatedly tried to impress upon the dissenters. The dissenters, in their turn, did not quite appreciate this anxiety and they were not ready to accept it as an argument against launching a democratic movement. They said they were mature enough to be able to expose anti-national elements out to disrupt their movement; it was high time their leaders shed the safe, moderate image which they are over-anxious to preserve before the Government. They

JULY 27, 1968

pointed out that their leaders' hesitation in giving the movement a momentum was encouraging the Government to lull them by false hopes.

It is hardly surprising that the main spokesmen of the APHLC were greeted with cynicism and suspicion. Nor is it surprising that on many points they did not find themselves in accord with a large number of delegates. The undercurrent of bitterness created by the Centre's disregard for the hill people's aspirations has inevitably caused cracks in the APHLC. Dissension over policy-decisions became so acute that an important member like Prof H. Lyngdoh, with a good following behind him, had to be expelled from the APHLC. Mr Hoover Hynnieta, Vice-Chairman, Council of Action, and Mr M. Kharkongor, Vice-Chairman, APHLC District Branch, have threatened to quit in protest against the arbitrary action taken by the APHLC President, Dr Williamson Sangma, against Prof Lyngdoh. There are many more representing powerful clans who are still to be tamed. They are angry because they think that the Government of India has deliberately slammed all the gates of hope in their face, and that the present leadership of the APHLC has become instrumental in making Government pretences work. Can the present leadership of the APHLC afford to ignore the weight of popular support behind such feelings, no matter how unwisely some may try to stoke them?

Whether a non-violent direct action would bring any settlement is very much in doubt, especially when the formidable patriots have already start-

ed talking their heads off, obviously to make out a case against Assam's reorganisation. The nightmare of 'Sino-Pakistani designs' over Assam is haunting Mr Chaliha, the apostle of territorial integrity, day and night. The Jana Sangh, the agent of monopolists in Assam, has come forward to help Mr Chaliha and offered to do what it can to tone up the worst anti-reorganisation propaganda. The Sanghis are not content with the two big communal riots they fanned in Assam during the last six months; they are not content with the acute food crisis they have created in this State by strengthening the hands of the blackmarketeers and hoarders. Now they want the Government to step up its military activities in the hill areas so that the hill people could be held at the point of the bayonet. Their simple argument against reorganisation is that it must be resisted at all costs if the 'Sino-Pakistani plotters' have to be kept at bay. That the floods have taken a heavy toll of life and made lakhs of people homeless in the Valley, that people are dying of starvation in Goalpara district, that youths of Assam in recent years have grown extremely restless over the unemployment situation created by monopoly interests, are of no importance to them. Well, the Jana Sangh has another argument to offer. Muslims would be a majority community in the Valley if the hill areas are separated from Assam and in that case Pakistan will have no difficulty in grabbing the whole area.

Mrs Indira Gandhi came to Assam to have a look at the flood-affected areas from a helicopter. This time, when Pressmen sought her comment on reorganisation, she did not open up a torrent of progressive verbiage. Instead, she flatly called it a 'controversial' issue and, incidentally, mentioned the 'Sino-Pakistani-Naga-Mizo' conspiracy. In her opinion, the time is not yet ripe for a decision on this 'very controversial issue'. Perhaps she means that any decision on the issue must await till she and her fellow-travellers have been able to exploit fully the desperately troubled situation.

Diary in Bolivia

By

CHE GUEVARA

Introduction by

FIDEL CASTRO

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A Puzzling Eminence

IT is puzzling even to many astute politicians whether the frequent visits of the West Pakistan Governor, General Mohammad Musa, to the garrison-town Capital are attuned to Mexi-Pak wave length or the exigencies of administration, political or otherwise.

Doubtless, General Musa has beaten all previous records of gubernatorial contacts with the Centre, especially, during the last five months. He is not only in ear-kissing touch with the President but also maintains very close contact with the Central Cabinet Ministers.

Though not a politician, it seems, his interests as an administrator of a robust province are slowly pushing him into the orbit of politics.

Apparently there is nothing wrong if a Governor is active. It can only mean a very healthy influence on the administration. But somehow politicians have grown a little inquisitive since he hosted a lunch in honour of MNAs from East Pakistan in Hotel Intercontinental.

Politicians as they are, the MNAs from East Pakistan threw a dinner in the same hotel the very next day in honour of their Governor, Abdul Monem Khan. It was a good matching of lunch with dinner, if nothing else.

If lunches and dinners have any importance, General Musa had a dinner on June 12, given in his honour by the Chief Parliamentary Secretary, Mohammad Hanif Khan. It is not at all surprising if the Pindi reporters are confused about the good Press that General Musa is receiving, next only to the President and even better sometimes. During the President's illness he was invariably catching front-page headlines. And he remains stuck on the front page of the national dailies even after the President's recovery from pulmonary embolism.

Having proved his administrative worth as the Governor of a politics-ridden province, it was but natural for General Musa to have shot into pro-

minence. But reporters must see something more in it because they look at things in retrospect.

While the President was on his way to recovery, *The Pakistan Times* had editorially suggested in its issue of March 3 that the "President must be persuaded to slacken his hot pace" And that "he must consider dispensing with some of his more taxing ceremonial functions and some of the lesser administrative duties."

Again in the same issue of *The Pakistan Times* its columnist, Z. A. Suleri, had recommended in a signed article on the editorial page that "two considerations command attention. While the election will be momentous because it will provide the final test of the viability of the Constitution, the President cannot be saddled with the entire pressure of winning it as before. His support in the country is no doubt massive. But the organisation of the masses into a political force to be reckoned with is not yet. What is needed is the fashioning of a machine geared to the purpose of political functioning and a band of practitioners of calibre to run it. This need was always there, only now it has become more unavoidable."

The *Pakistan Observer*, Dacca, dated March 23, in its editorial captioned "The President's Recovery" discussed the question of succession threadbare and wished that the President remained in good health and in control of the situation so that "the country is spared the dynastic and succession troubles that have disfigured our past history."

The same issue of *The Pakistan Observer* recommended (1) "a power structure devised in such a way that it will contain within itself its own correctives against excesses of judgments: (2) a method of selecting the country's rulers that shall reflect informed opinion and the dearly-held aspirations of various interests and regions. As we said before, the time has come for a dialogue to start."

Those were the days when General

Musa was in the prime of publicity. Seen in this background lunches and dinners have something more than food value.

The foreground seems to be more important than the backwash. It is really sad that the Opposition chose the National Assembly forum last month to debate the health of the President. References made to General Musa in the Assembly were inevitable.

Castigating the Council of Ministers at the Centre for wrongly advising the President on national issues, the former member of the Council of Ministers and the Speaker of the National Assembly, Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, told the House here last month that the "President is a sick man and it was not possible for him to look into everything."

Another Shocker

While the House was shocked to hear such unkind remarks from Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, who at one time swore by his loyalty to the President, another shocker was thrown by Masihur Rehman, the temperamental politician from Rangpur.

Masihur Rehman made an uncalled for disclosure that a high CSP official of the Central Government—a specialist on East Pakistan—told him in Dacca during Ayub Khan's illness that the "President's health is like an umbrella with the ribs but without the cloth!" Continuing his oration, Mr Masihur Rehman said that such incidents raise the issue of succession and, therefore, some thought should be given to this issue.

Under such circumstances, it is but natural that reporters start seeing General Musa taller than he is. Should they be blamed for it?

Masihur Rehman put a keener edge to reporters' appetite by disclosing some of his observations in the House. He said that during the illness of the President, photographs of Army Generals, supplied by the Press and Information Department, always found their way to front pages of the national dailies. When the President was on

the way to recovery, the photos of General were pushed into inside pages, leaving the front page for General Musa. That was the time when the East Pakistan Governor chose to receive the Key of the City of Dacca, he added.

The Opposition must recall its own appraisals in the National Assembly about the political situation in the country and then decide whether General Musa's statements on administrative matters deserve a place in newspapers or not.

The Opposition members themselves appraised the National Assembly last month about the imposition of curfew in Quetta, promulgation of section 144 in Dacca, tension in Sind and Baluchistan and dissatisfaction among the peasants of the Punjab.

The Opposition is also aware that its contagion has caught even some among the ruling party in the National Assembly. Wassan, Abdul Hamid Jatoi and Mumtaz Bhutto of the former province of Sind and Ghulam Mustafa Khar of Muzaffargarh have already raised a banner of revolt against the bureaucracy. Even Muzaffar Mehdi Hasmi of Muzaffargarh and Ruhul Amin of Noakhali did not spare the Government in their Budget speeches.

Instead of beating their breasts in frustration, the opposition would be well advised to ponder over the situation coolly and see for themselves whether it is the contribution of newspapers or any other agency which has rocketed General Musa into prominence.

It appears, General Musa could not help sharing some of the administrative burdens interlapping between the Centre and the Provinces. Will this argument convince reporters? Surely not.

(From *Holiday*, Dacca)

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Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

PROTESTS and demonstrations, so long frowned upon by the Establishment, have apparently gained respectability in Calcutta. Perhaps very soon the much maligned 'gherao' also will find its place in the new order. The very correct and respectable citizens who are usually irked by processions and demonstrations by their more unfortunate fellow-citizens are themselves taking to the streets. The obvious contradiction in their ambivalent attitude does not strike them.

Only very recently the subordinate employees of hospitals in Calcutta came in for much scathing criticism from doctors in general, and glowing accounts were published as to how things had improved during the period of the strike by these employees. Little of course was heard of the failure to provide for equipment for sterilization or disposal of soiled linen, matters for which the much maligned Class IV employees were not responsible by a long chalk.

When it is a question of their own interests, doctors have been quite quick on the uptake. The proposal for enlistment of unqualified medical practitioners in West Bengal triggered off a procession, albeit silent, by members of the State Branch of the Indian Medical Association to Raj Bhavan. The Association feels that if the proposal becomes law it would be injurious to the health of the people as this would permit a large number of persons who are neither educated or qualified nor technically trained to legally carry on practice of medicine, even though with restricted scope.

That many of the doctors genuinely believe that the proposed legislation, if gone through, will endanger the health of the people is quite natural. But it would be straining one's credibility too much to say that a still larger number are not fearful about the competition they would have to face if recognition is granted to unqualified doctors.

All praise is due to those noble souls in the medical profession who, in spite of tremendous odds, try to do the best they can without thought of self. But human nature and social values in our democracy being what they are, their number is pitifully limited. For the large majority it is a profession they follow because it pays and they do not care how.

The horror of qualified medical practitioners would have been justified if they had taken as much interest in putting their own house in order. The code of ethics is honoured more in the breach than in observance. Punitive action by the Medical Council is rare indeed. But who does not know where to go for an illegal abortion to a qualified doctor with his brand new Ambassador, who does not know that for admission to a hospital for an operation or long treatment at least 2 or 3 'visits' have to be paid to the doctor in charge of the ward, who is ever at a loss to find some one to write out a false medical certificate? With these of course the common people are quite familiar. Less known are certain other things: the commissions on sales against prescriptions, and on fees for various tests, a percentage even for sending on a patient to a consultant. With all the hue and cry against unqualified doctors or quacks as they are called, it might have been supposed that the heaven-born of the profession had nothing to do with them. Unfortunately for medical ethics some of these quacks have a large following in villages and many a consultant in his less affluent days was not averse to receiving these quacks with his patients and paying him a cut of the high fees.

If truth be told, there are a large number of qualified quacks about. Some of those who passed ten, fifteen or twenty years back have managed to forget most of what they learnt. Moreover, medicine and surgery are changing at a terribly fast pace and it is not an easy job for any practitioner

to keep up to date. In the context of modern developments in medicine and surgery the position of many qualified practitioners is actually little better than that of so-called quacks who at least are fully conscious of the lack of a degree.

In the urban areas, the unregistered doctor is a rarity. In the rural areas he is common as anything. The reason is plain. The city-bred doctor, increasingly lured to the profession by its economic possibilities and less and less by any need to serve, is most averse to either practice or even taking a job in the villages, as a result of which the government health centres remain perpetually short of staff.

The vacuum thus created is filled by the unqualified practitioners. No doubt some of them are just charlatans but they soon get found out. Others with their limited knowledge and experience do fill a need and are suitably rewarded, which should not be grudged them by those who are not willing to face the hardships of village life.

The 'craze for foreign' has seized well and true the new and brilliant young men and even women who enter the profession of medicine. It is fashionable to speak of the poor facilities for work available here and more so in the villages. Therefore, to be true to themselves and their calling, they feel they must 'go to foreign.' In the process they conveniently forget that the cost of their education has been borne by those very people in the villages by imposts on matches, tea, kerosene, cloth and such like things. If they are to be left to the care of the unqualified doctors, why not remove the stigma of 'quacks' and give them some official recognition for the work they do, which those better qualified disdain to do?

* * *

Much has been said and written about the film crisis but there are some piquant developments which deserve a little attention. The Sangrakshan Samity's dictat to cinema houses showing Bengali films and its aftermath are revealing. Ostensibly the Samity is working for saving Bengali films but interestingly the net im-

mediate effect has been to stop screening of Bengali films in the houses whose owners have refused to toe the Samity's line. There might have been some logic in it if the Samity had started a movement for screening of Bengali films in houses not doing so. But apparently the Samity, in spite of talk, funks the issue.

The dispute as of now seems to have resolved itself into a pure and simple one about sharing the spoils as between the producers and exhibitors. The argument that a greater share of the spoils to the producers will save the industry and the workers is specious indeed. The greater share of the exhibitors has not saved the workers in the halls. It remains to be seen whether the exhibitors who could keep their halls shut for 3½ months cannot do so for some time more.

What surprises me most, however, is the role of the ordinary film and laboratory workers in this purely inter-necine quarrel between two sets of exploiters. Co-existence on the international plane has now found its parallel on the trade union front, giving us the astonishing spectacle of workers fighting the battle of their employers for higher profits in the hope that some crumbs will be thrown to them. If this ideology catches on, logically we should be able to see the Birlas, Dalmias, Sahu Jains and others of their ilk fighting the Government for higher profits and less taxation with their workers solidly behind them.

Clearing the footpaths of hawkers and the streets and parks and other dark places of anything which shocks the perverted sense of decency of these gentlemen is a sporadic activity to which members of our police force resort whenever they find time hanging heavy on their hands. With the recent emphasis on 'political crime' and its dying out due to the United Front getting busy with elections the police have again turned their attention to their off-time pastime. Clearing of footpaths was, of course, stopped for some time by Governor Sri Dharma Vira. But apparently the instructions were forgotten by the

Police Commissioner or the Governor or maybe both and policemen have again become active.

In their other routine activity, to wit the regulation of decency, however, the police appear to have over-reached themselves. They have been rounding up and otherwise pestering young men and women found sitting closely together or just holding hands. This the police find extremely obnoxious. Public opinion seems to have advanced faster than the police. There has been a spate of correspondence on the subject in a local daily and the question asked as to what business the police have in interfering in such things. An interesting point made by some is this—when jobs and houses are both scarce, what harm if young people in love who cannot marry show their affection to each other in public?

But all this seems beside the point. Whatever the motivation of the top police bosses for initiating such stunts, all the others just love them for the opportunity it gives them of making a little extra on the side. The regular extortions from hawkers ended only with the installing in power of the United Front Government and it may take some time to re-establish the pattern should political conditions be ripe.

As for the unfortunate young lovers accused of indecency it is a hit or miss affair for the police. Most of them will rather die than be accused by the police of indecency in public but too few of them carry enough money to buy immunity from the minions of the law. I remember a friend in the long past who sat with his bride-to-be in a taxi parked on the Strand, discussing plans to get over the objections of their families to the marriage. Suddenly, the law came into the picture and threatened to haul both of them to the police station on a charge of indecent behaviour. The girl almost died of shame and fright; but luckily my friend had some money on him and could pay up what was demanded. Decency was once again established on the Strand and the law went its peaceful way looking for another pocket of indecency to be wiped out, of course, at a price.

Several Maladies

COMMENTATOR

THE likely recommendations of the all-party committee on defections have found their way to the Press even before the committee has formally endorsed the report. From the nature of the recommendations it appears that the game of defection would be allowed to continue for some time before any curb, if at all, is placed on it. For the recommendations of the committee will require an amendment of the Constitution which, even in normal circumstances, cannot be rushed through. In the present case, the Central Government itself is interested in delaying a decision so that the Congress may topple the remaining non-Congress Ministries in the meantime by inducing defections. At one stage the Congress could have had reasons for favouring urgent action as Congress Ministries were collapsing in rapid succession. That phase is past, and the Congress is on the offensive now. A curb on defections will have to wait, therefore, till the Congress has been able to lure into its fold the vulnerable elements of united front governments. As the committee has made no suggestion for punishing past defections, those who have turned their coats already will continue to enjoy merrily the fruits of their betrayal. On the other hand, the sponsored reports of a likely curb, however ineffective, will encourage the weak and vacillating to take without much ado the bait the Congress is dangling before them, for tomorrow may be too late. This will accelerate the process on which the Congress is working for the past few months.

The only effective guarantee against defection is compulsory retirement and a fresh verdict by the electorate. But this has not been accepted by the committee. It is doubtful also if the recommendations will cover half-way defections in which the renegades do not join any new party but form a

small group which is hoisted to power by the Congress. The party has developed a special liking for such minority ministries as they give it ample opportunity for back-seat driving. The position of independents also remains ambiguous. Quibblers may not regard their post-election alliance with a party as defection but in fact it is so, especially if an independent joins a party whose candidate he defeated in the election.

But even such half-hearted measures have been able to secure the approval of some papers. *The Hindustan Times* finds the committee's recommendations "unexceptionable"; it does not even think that all the three major recommendations are necessary. The proposed ceiling on the size of ministries is redundant as the first recommendation of the committee temporarily debars a floor-crossing legislator from ministership. Since defections in most recent cases were brought about by offers of ministerial office, the recommendation should go a long way to curb the evil. The committee's third recommendation that the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers should belong to the Lower House does not also appeal to the paper as "it has no direct bearing" on the problem of floor-crossing. The paper also wants the definition of defection to be confined to floor-crossing, that is, movement from opposition benches to government or from government to opposition. "Carpet-crossing", or any movement within the opposition in the form of mergers of groups or parties or other consolidation of forces cannot properly be considered defectionism. Not to keep this distinction in mind would be to postpone the polarisation of political forces which alone can help reduce the confusingly large number of political parties the country fields today.

The Indian Express, on the other

hand, cannot understand why the committee should have fought shy of a straightforward penalty on defectors in the form of a compulsion to seek re-election. The roundabout procedure favoured by the majority is "pointless". The primary objection to defection is not that the defector seeks to get into a ministry—after all, every legislator desires to become a minister—but that he breaks faith with the party, on whose ticket he got elected, for the sake of office. And in defecting from his party after election, he is also failing to keep faith with the electorate. He should be obliged to seek re-election as the condition of continued membership of the legislature. In fact, automatic resignation and seeking re-election in the event of a member changing his party allegiance should form the first article of the code of ethics for legislators whose drawing up has been suggested by the committee. If such a code is drawn up by agreement among all parties and is enforced rigorously, much of the aberrations witnessed since the last general election would be unlikely to recur. The committee's insistence on the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers being members of the Lower House is constitutionally justified because the Council of Ministers is required to be collectively responsible to the Lower House. The deviations from this requirement in the past, though they were very few and were due to exceptional circumstances, were quite unfortunate and should not be regarded as precedents.

The Statesman would welcome limitation of the size of Central and State Cabinets even if that did not discourage defections. But a ceiling at ten or eleven per cent would leave ample scope for inducing people to cross the floor with a promise of Ministerial office. Perhaps a more effective check would be the proposed provision that no one should be appointed a minister within a year of crossing the floor. The paper says that it is not clear whether the proposed one-year bar would apply to defections from the ruling party or coalition in the event of a new government being formed. Possibly it would, but there

would still remain the problem of defections motivated not by any immediate prospect of Ministerial office but by other temptations or factional manoeuvring. These do no less harm to political stability than is caused by ratting in the hope of immediate and obvious rewards. The all-party committee on defections did not accept the lawyer-members' recommendation that defectors should suffer some disqualification or be forced to seek re-election or be debarred from membership of the legislature for six years in cases in which their action is prompted by lure of office or some other gratification. Such measures might have been somewhat extreme, but there is clearly a case for some penalty to be prescribed for unprincipled change of political loyalties.

The Hindu is glad that the established political parties have an interest in preventing their members from crossing the floor and abandoning the party banner for the sake of personal gain. The issue is basically one of party discipline and loyalty and cannot satisfactorily be tackled by legislation. The paper is, however, against a narrow interpretation of defection as it was not feasible to apply the term "defector" to independents or members of such coalition groups as the Bharatiya Kranti Dal. The paper says a real gain that has arisen out of the recent discussions on this vexed question is that the leaders of the main political parties have already realised the dangers of irresponsible defection and the unworkability of loose coalitions. It is one thing to form electoral arrangements to avoid the splitting of votes and quite another to frame political programmes on which disparate parties can run a government. This problem of defection is but a symptom of a larger malady. The best way to cure it is for like-minded parties to merge with one another and reduce the total number of parties rather than continue the recent process of splitting existing parties and later trying to form coalition governments that cannot work as a team when they attain office.

Dealing with another aspect that

vitiates the country's political life *The Times of India* says it is too late now for the Central Government to back out of its definite commitment to Parliament to ban company donations to political parties. Opinion may differ over the extent to which the power of big money sways party policies but there is no doubt that it has a "corrupting influence". Elections will not become clean the moment a ban is imposed on company contributions. So long as fighting an election remains an expensive business this may indeed have the opposite effect. If company contributions are banned large donations to parties will as a rule come from individuals who have plenty of black money. Having invested large sums in the elections they will naturally demand quick returns. The resulting corruption of political life may, therefore, be much greater. As a matter of fact, much of the prevailing political corruption even today is the result of the black money that goes into the pockets of individual candidates who do not have to account for it. Any ban on company contributions to party funds must, therefore, be regarded as no more than a first step towards the cleaning up of political life. To be effective it will have to be followed up by other corrective measures. The statements of election expenses submitted by most candidates today are as a rule "false". Surely better means can be devised to check their accuracy. It may not be possible to prevent donations in black money to individual candidates. But it ought to be well within the means of the authorities to enforce the law more strictly and see that the limits fixed for election expenses are not exceeded.

Commenting on the "anti-boss movement" simultaneously developing in the Congress party in West Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh *Patriot* says that while such evidence of serious re-appraisal by young and radical leaders of the party and fairly large sections of the rank and file are encouraging, it should not be forgotten by Congress non-conformists that the voter will not be particularly impressed any more by their radicalism as long as it is only

some kind of a gesture language. What is expected is concrete commitment by reformist and radical Congressmen to the principle that democratic power should not be achieved through dishonest tricks of propaganda, bribery of voters, and opportunist faction patch-ups exclusively meant to get some individuals into office. The commitment, if it is to be taken seriously by the people, will have to be explained in terms of the readiness of radical Congressmen ideologically to ally and work with non-Congress Left parties who have learnt through their own experience that reactionary elements in so-called united fronts reduce these bodies to total impotence. For the voters, the supreme question is whether a clean government, free of the paralysing influence of Marwari and foreign interests, can be formed by those returned to the Assembly and whether such a government will have the necessary internal unity and courage to implement economic and social programmes governed by the principles of democracy and socialism. This, they know, will be possible whether in Bengal or elsewhere only if the Left in the Congress takes its due position in a new united front made up of all non-sectarian radical trends.

KING HENRY
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Shouvanik's Latest

RUDRAPRASAD SEN GUPTA

SHOUVANIK has started performing a new play, *Nona Jal Mithe Mati*, at Mukta Angan. Dramatized by Sudhansu Mandal from a tale by Prafulla Roy, it deals with the refugee problem, a problem rarely probed in depth. Here too, Mr Roy, through the depiction of the struggle for survival of a group of refugees rehabilitated in the Andamans, succeeds in portraying only one aspect (though a major one) of the issue. Only the pain due to economic predicament is focussed; the complex pattern of the tragedy that the uprooted human beings experience is evaded willy nilly. A man is tied to his soil by more strings than one can consciously discover and when he loses his home all these strings are snapped together. The subsequent tragedy eats him up at various levels: it operates through the conscious, the sub-conscious and the unconscious simultaneously. Hence a complex tragedy. In *Nona Jal Mithe Mati*, the tragedy is shorn of all these complications. Possibly the social critic is here intruding into the critic's role. Yet there are issues which would not permit the socially conscious and the pure aesthete to remain in watertight compartments. The refugee problem is one such issue.

Mr Mandal has done a neat job with the dramatization. Could one, however, ask him to edit the text a little so that certain informative repetitions are clipped? The production, on the whole, is rather impressive. Gobinda Ganguly, the director, exploited the technicians to accentuate the poetry of the theme. The illusion of a barren stretch of uneven land has been brought out by platforms of cubic shape; the use of dirty colours and bare poles is remarkably tuned with the play's temper. Swarup Mukherjee's zonal lighting is competent; the employment of blue, amber and other soft colours to intensify the delicate and the romantic situations is artistic; but the violent and the passionate moments could be heightened

by the use of more strong colours.

Mr Ganguly in future should be a little more careful about his make-up scheme, particularly about the wigs, but he has very little to do about his players. Most of them (a good many are yet in their novitiate) are easy with their intonation, voice and physical movements. Particular mention, however, must be made of Anuradha Dasgupta and Sutapa Chakravarti. In the role of a passionate woman who cannot any longer deny the call of the flesh after years of cohabitation with a decrepit, Anuradha Dasgupta is impressive. Her burning eyes, quivering voice, sensitive face and emotionally charged gait work in unison to bring into life an archetypal woman. One who has seen her performance in a completely different type of role in *Pata Jhore Jai* cannot but conclude that here is a powerful and wide-ranged actress in the making. Sutapa Chakravarti's portrayal of a woman who is slightly off her rocker is striking for its restraint and poise. Also worth mentioning are Gopal Sanyal's peevish Nitya, Pannalal Maitra's unobtrusively effective Rasik, Asit Ghosh's virile and rustic Haran, Gopal Mukherjee's naively funny Gupi, Bimal Banerjee's docile Bipadbhanjan and Manab Mukherjee's naturally rendered Paran. Gobinda Ganguly plays his role with his usual gusto and competence, yet he never reaches great heights perhaps because of its somewhat conventional nature.

What really impedes the movement and dilutes the intensity of the production is its music. The effect-music is nearly always of the stock variety. Moreover it is never in accordance with the poetic temper of the play. Many are the moments when the poetry created by efficient exploitation of the words alone evaporates with the introduction of music. The songs, too, however well-composed and well-sung and, therefore, artistically valid in themselves, could be fewer and cut to size. Debashish Das Gupta, the music director, should take care to avoid songs alien to the temper of this play. Baul, for example, has no place in this drama.

Tyrants Old And New

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

THE German films of the twenties represent the nearest approximation to a national cinema in the sense that they more or less authentically reflect the feelings of the period, the typical angst of a prostrated nation. Almost each film of this era records the neurosis and the dark pessimism of a demoralised people and the total effect of this cinema of anguish is stunning because a bunch of writers, poets, designers and artistes took up the cinema as a means of self-expression during this period. Kracauer's theory that the films of this time are the premonitions of the future may be a bit far-fetched, but the fact that the film-makers tried to make their works a true mirror of their times is beyond any doubt. The very topicality of these films might have been a major drawback and they would have been dated and stale but for their remarkable visual brilliance. The recent showing of two silent German classics, *Accident* (a short by Erno Metzner) and *Waxworks* (directed by Paul Leni) by Calcutta Film Society takes us back to those nightmarish years of post-Versailles Germany. *Accident* depicts the plight of the individual in the asphalt jungle. The individual is lonely, helpless and devoid of love. The authorities are tyrants, the compatriots cold and callous. Only the yellow metal counts and the image of the circling coins which recurs in the hallucinations of the wounded hero strongly underlines the inherent gold-lust of human nature. This complex theme has been successfully realised on the screen through a skilful use of camera and editing and the studio-made streets look as real as the streets of Rome on which Rossellini and De Sica turned their cameras. The brilliant music score using fast rhythm, a later addition to the original silent visuals, emphasises the hysteria of urban life. While Metzner concentrates on modern man and his environment, Leni goes back to the past and the wax-dummies of the

three legendary figures; Harun-al-Raschid, Ivan the Terrible and Jack-the-Ripper are reincarnated as a young poet recreates their past on paper. The episode of Harun-al-Raschid has the Lubitsch touch of an erotic comedy in which the nocturnal rounds of the benevolent Caliph turn out to be just amorous jaunts and Emil Jannings' larger-than-life portrayal of Harun-al-Raschid is ample proof of the wide range of this gifted actor. Ivan becomes a high-priest of terror and Conrad Veidt's performance vividly brings out the tyrannical force of this maniac Emperor and in the last scene where the mighty Czar slowly turns into a raving lunatic, the acting really achieves a tragic height. Jack-the-Ripper's episode, despite brilliant execution, is short and sketchy. As the killer assumes human form and begins chasing the poet and his girl in a dream the past and present are interlinked, and the deserted fair-ground with its curved alleys and gigantic ferris wheel becomes the symbol of chaos. Expressionism, the mainstream of Leni's inspiration, creatively pervades the film and the stylised settings of Caliph's Baghdad and Czarist Russia with angular windows, pell-mell roofs and eerie lighting effects successfully portray the mood of claustrophobic horror.

Letters

France

Mr B. P. Adhikari has raised certain pertinent questions (*Frontier*, July 13) on the recent political upheaval in France but his analysis is much too subjective. He considers the French question without ever going beyond the boundaries of France; he fails to recognise France as a decadent imperialist country facing a crisis which has been deepening since World War II owing to the shrinking of colonial exploitation as a result of national liberation movements and the massive U.S. aggression in the world market cutting into the other imperialist countries' share of colonial booty.

England has been trying to survive

by giving in to the U.S. pressure and even by opening up her womb to the U.S. monopoly capitalists. Today in the U.K. 52% of the capital invested in the motor industry, nearly 95% in the soap and cosmetic industries and 100% in the film industry are controlled by the dollar. But this cannot go on for long, since Vietnam is causing heavy erosion of the U.S. economy. Devaluation showed how not only India, a neo-colonial victim of America, but also England, reduced to a U.S. protege, have been bearing the brunt of the American crisis.

France, out of her national pride and her long-standing antagonistic relation with England, behaved unlike the latter by bringing her contradiction with the U.S.A. to the fore. This has further deepened her economic crisis, a fact which has missed the notice of Mr Adhikari. The recent student-worker upheaval which rocked France had its roots in this growing crisis. Neo-colonialism will not save France. The internal contradictions in France and other metropolitan countries will sharpen as the struggle against colonialism grows and they are forced to fall back upon their own capitalist economy and pauperise their working class. This will also sharpen the contradiction between the U.S.A. and other capitalist countries, leading to self-destruction of both. Thus the people of Vietnam and of Asia, Africa and Latin America are fighting not only for their own liberation but also for the whole of mankind.

The French students, particularly the "extremists", are realising this truth of our era. They are trying to sharpen the internal contradiction through militant class struggle which will help them to unite with the struggling millions of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

HITU GHOSH
Calcutta

Manusher Adhikarey

I refer to Sumanta Banerjee's comments on Utpal Dutt's *Manusher Adhikarey* (July 20). Some of our critics

have a marked tendency to judge a thing by its outer essence and not by its inner theme. In *Manusher Adhikarey* Utpal Dutt shows the hollowness and reactionary role of American democracy, hitherto known as the greatest democratic State. Between the Alabama case and the year 1967, he also shows the coming of the new philosophy of the 'Black Power' revolution. Throughout the play a clear ideology is depicted, that is, 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun'. But critics like Sumanta Banerjee cannot go far enough to realise this very inner theme owing to their petty-bourgeois outlook. It is quite natural for them to attempt to find a relation between the play and Utpal Dutt's agreement with 20th Century Fox and his surrender to the Government but I wonder how such an article could find a place in your paper which, I believe, possesses a firm class outlook.

CHIRANJEEB RAY
Calcutta

Boring

It is my belief that if you serve your readers nothing but politics, your weekly cannot be saved. And what is the use of carrying letters covering more than two pages of a small weekly? The writer of the letter from Dankuni (July 13) ought to have been cut down—the same writer on the same subject!

You should not forget that man is not composed of political ideas alone. You should keep a corner for articles and essays answering to the needs of a complete man.

I love the weekly, but I am bored.

NIRMALENDU BHATTACHARYA
Calcutta

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