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On Other Pages

COMMENTS ..	2
<i>View From Delhi</i>	
THE DE-STABILISATION GAME	
FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT ..	6
FRANKLY SPEAKING	
SANJOY ..	7
<i>Kerala</i>	
CONFIDENCE TRICK	
RAMJI ..	9
<i>Sikkim</i>	
FAIR ELECTIONS?	
FROM A CORRESPONDENT ..	10
<i>Letter From America</i>	
THE U.S. IN LAOS	
ROBI CHAKRAVORTI ..	11
CALCUTTA DIARY	
GYAN KAPUR ..	12
LAND TO THE TILLER—II	
SUMANTA BANERJEE ..	14
ISADORA	
MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY ..	16
LETTERS ..	16

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A PROBLEM OF LEADERSHIP

MR JYOTI Basu (for the Patna attempt on his life see page 2) and his colleagues in the CPM have drawn a blank in New Delhi. That they would, should have been known to the party after the series of discussions Mr Basu had with the Leninist Governor. One should suppose that the CPM leaders have not suddenly become so credulous as to be taken in by the Centre's mock-reluctance to intervene in West Bengal. It is doubtful if Mr Ajoy Mukherjee had taken a single step without the knowledge and approval of the Centre; the entire drama had perhaps been rehearsed to perfection over the cups of hot chocolate that he used to have at Raj Bhavan during his midnight meetings with the Governor. His resignation before the Assembly had had the time to pass the budget was a piece of careful planning and not an unthinking act of exasperation with the CPM as his apologists sought to make out. After all, he had put up with the Marxists for more than five months after his party had cast itself in the role of West Bengal's saviour; a few more days could not have mattered much, if at all. In 1967, he continued to head the UF Ministry till it was dismissed, though he had declared in his unmade statement of 2 October that the Ministry should not be allowed to remain in office for a day more. His impatience this time was studied; he acted on the dictates of his friends, if not masters, in New Delhi so that the Centre may seize upon the urgency of passing the Budget to impose President's rule on the State after a cursory exploration of the possibilities of an alternative ministry. Mr Mukherjee's so-called resignation in a huff was a cue to the Centre to enter and hold the stage so that backstage manoeuvres for a mini-front ministry may continue leisurely.

The Centre's keenness to take West Bengal under its reactionary wings should have been obvious to the CPM. If it was not, the fault is of the ambivalent attitude of the party towards the Prime Minister and, consequently, to her Congress. Even after the hard knocks it has received in Kerala and West Bengal, the CPM is unable to write off the socialism of Mrs Gandhi, though its enchantment is not so unseeing as that of the CPI. It is the Marxists' lingering faith in the possibility of the ultimate redemption of the socialist Prime Minister that makes leaders hurry to New Delhi at every opportunity to discuss matters with

her and her close colleagues. If the Prime Minister had any intention to order an early election in West Bengal she would not have taken the trouble of carrying out such an elaborate plan to prepare a situation in which President's rule would appear as an act of grace and not interference. Nor would there have been any need to appoint as many as four highly paid and high-powered advisers to assist the Governor. President's rule is merely a euphemism for governance by Mr Chavan and his Ministry; by foisting advisers of its own choosing on the State the Centre has left no one in doubt about the kind of administration that is in store for the people of West Bengal.

The CPM refuses to take these broad hints because its leaders are enmeshed in parliamentary politics. At the Maidan meeting last Sunday Mr Basu said his party would prepare "peacefully" for the election if the Centre promised to order it by May. He was not so clear about what the party would do if the Centre did not oblige. In New Delhi a few days earlier he had said that his party would launch a 1967-type movement if an early election was denied to West Bengal. That movement was a farce which had amused more people than it had impressed. A movement of that genre, even if it is directed solely by Mr Basu and not, as in 1967, jointly by him, Mr Sushil Dhara and Mr Somnath Lahiri, will make little impact. Besides, will another election solve the State's problems? The brave new united front of Mr Promode Das-Gupta's dream may not get into office in the face of the combined opposition of the Congress and the not-so-left parties. If it does, it will be incapacitated by the constraints imposed by the Constitution. Yet the CPM leaders are bent on pursuing this self-defeating policy because they are afraid to learn from the experiments with the two united fronts; they refuse to admit the futility of the parliamentary game because that would entail a re-thinking of the

party's policy and programme. By setting its face against the reality the leadership is curbing the militancy of the cadres and exposing them to repression. It is stated that already about 600 CPM men have been arrested; there is no doubt that their

number will swell as the mass arrests are still continuing. The frustrating experience of the year in office and the current attack pose a challenge to the CPM to which the leadership's recipe of a campaign for an early poll is no answer.

The Patna Attempt

Gunners and bomb-throwers are, and will be, more active in West Bengal in the days to come and the air will be sulphurous enough to prevent any critical assessment of the political situation. In other words, a period of unproductive, not revolutionary, violence, is likely to characterise the contemporary scene in this State. The attempt on the life of Mr Jyoti Basu at Patna, in which an LIC officer was killed, is another symptom of the disease. Even from the first, scarce details, at the time of writing, it was clear that the attack was inspired. The atmosphere for the attack was well prepared by the newspaper coverage of the Burdwan incident in which three people, two of them not innocent lambs, were killed in a house besieged by an angry CPM crowd. Such murders have not been exceptional of late, but what led to the outcry was the alleged inaction of the police who were present on the spot. Even this might not have been enough to boost the anti-CPM propaganda, because the police have not been famous for their action for quite some time. What fed the righteous indignation, the hysteria, was the series of pictures of the female relatives of the killed and the gruesome details, some of which are false. It is curious that we are tolerant of unspeakable atrocities when they are committed on the minorities, or when the CRP in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere shoot in cold blood captured Naxalites, but are moved beyond words in other cases.

The reverberations of the Patna attack would have been formidable had Mr Basu died. Even now the attack would be treated as an attack on the CPM by parties hostile to it and the tendency to retaliate would be strong. But the party followers should—after the anger has abated—try to reassess the political course they have followed so far and the effete course they are being advised to take now.

Not A Bed Of Roses

Mrs Indira Gandhi is learning to her cost that New Delhi need not be India. Altogether, it has been an extraordinary tame budget session, and Mrs Gandhi has been the monarch of all she has surveyed. But for one or two ritualistic whimpers, the parliamentary opposition has kind of withered away.

But the chicanery of it all, the rest of the country has started misbehaving. Across the States, during the past fortnight, things have re-

fused to click. Mr Gurnam Singh of Punjab was sacked by the Panthic leadership; Mr Chavan's subsidiary empire is straining in Marathwada; Mr Jagjvan Ram's foray in Orissa has ended in near-disaster; Kerala's proxy regime may now collapse any day; Gujarat, despite Mr C. C. Desai's hard day's work, has not caved in; and, to top all, the biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha have been a shambles.

In the aggregate, Mrs Gandhi has

lost fourteen members of her own hue in the elections; she will now command a flock of only 83 in the Sabha. True, the CPI has registered a net accretion of one seat: but a gain of one against a loss of fourteen remains an exceedingly poor political arithmetic. And the DMK's cussedness in refusing to accommodate Mr Subramaniam has been a tragic blow.

The worries over the 1972 elections can wait. Mrs Gandhi will now have to do some immediate research about the current contingencies. Neither the Akalis nor the DMK have acquiesced in performing the role assigned for them till yesterday, namely that of the complaisant husband. The mutual relationships with the parties have to be re-defined and, once more, on the basis of down-to-earth *quid pro quos*. For example, a Salem steel plant in exchange for a voting decision on a crucial division in the Lok Sabha, or the abolition of the Agricultural Tax in exchange for not raising fresh trouble over Fazilka.

Mr Subramaniam's failure will be a hard knock to take. In Kerala and West Bengal, Mrs Gandhi needs the CPI to fill in as strike-breaker and buffer against mass agitations, just as she needs their 23 votes in the Lok Sabha. But she has equal need to keep on the right side of the Americans; Mr Subramaniam as Finance Minister would have soothed several jittery nerves in Washington. The quality of a twice-defeated candidate may or may not belong to the genre of that twice-blessed attribute mentioned by Shakespeare, but what will Mrs Gandhi do, now that she cannot conveniently shed the portfolio of Finance, nor does she possess something to be readily gifted on a platter to the Americans?

There are other problems: the ire of a spurned Biju Patnaik, the plight of a going-going-any-day-now-going Achutha Menon, the folly of a nincompoop Ajoy Mukherjee, the greed of a risen-from-the-tax-ashes Jagjivan Ram, the machinations of a never-quite-to-be-trusted Chavan, the

grogginess of an apparently urbane Sadiq who nonetheless is unable to patch up his own home fence. Besides, despite the brave words in the Budget, prices, wretched prices have once more started to rise. In the post-budget week, the rise was the sharpest in two months. No question that here is a brave woman, trying to take it all. But, beyond a point, even trying can be a terribly trying thing, and all the shouting support in the Rajya Sabha of that lone knight, Sir Bhupesh Gupta, would not let her forget the gradual thinning of ranks round the country. Spare a thought for Madam Prime Minister, please: between defectors and roses, she is in for a lean time.

Kerala Capers

A correspondent writes:

Losing faith in the people is fatal for a Marxist, but that does not warrant invocation of "people" at all odd hours. To say that the mini-front ministry in Kerala has survived the budget session because of massive popular support, as Mr Achutha Menon and his followers are saying, is brazen hypocrisy. In case his ministry fell, an eventuality which was well within the realm of possibility, Mr Menon would not have referred to the people but blamed it all on the CPM conspiracy; the CPM and its allies, in Mr Menon's calculations, do not represent the people of Kerala, even if almost half of them voted for the CPM and its present supporters.

What happened in Kerala? Five Assembly members of the mini-front made it public that they were going to withdraw their support from the ministry. Assembly intrigues followed and within a week they came, all but one, directly or indirectly to support the ministry. It will be certainly known, what bait—ministership or something slightly less alluring—they swallowed and decided to hang on. Already there are rumours that the ministry might be expanded to strengthen its base and among

the names tipped as new ministers are members of the Kerala Karshaka Party, the rebel SSP and Karnataka Ekikakram Samithi. Is it not interesting to learn that the allegiance of these splinter parties representing five independent members of the Assembly was in doubt and Mr Menon won by means of their support?

Mr Menon, the honest and courageous Chief Minister, almost everybody agreed, showed his guts in seeking a vote of confidence. It now appears that he chose to be honest and courageous when he was sure of winning back the prodigal sons. The alacrity with which he manoeuvred to get the Assembly adjourned even when there was a number of issues pending does not exactly show him up as an honest-to-Constitution Chief Minister. The reason for premature adjournment was plain for everybody to see—the threat of the central committee of the RSP to withdraw support from the ministry because the ruling Congress had actively voted for the Menon ministry. The safest way for Mr Menon to live and let his progressive allies live was an adjournment of the Assembly.

The crisis of the Menon ministry is however not yet over. There has been a split in the ISP over the Seshan-Kunju tangle and either of the splinters must be going from the ruling mini-front. There will be a tussle between the central committee and the State committee of the RSP over backing the ministry and the result cannot be a strengthening of the mini-front. In spite of the benevolent reign of Mr Menon Kerala is bound to slip off the grips of the mini-front. Whether it will be another spell of President's rule or another alliance under the hegemony of the CPM remains to be seen.

Kerala, all the same, should perhaps serve as an object lesson for the moderate communists of the country. The CPM considers that it is not possible to achieve much under the present Constitution and yet agrees to form a ministry, without trying seriously to exploit the limit-

ed possibilities. What perhaps would have been more relevant, in the 1967 context, was to form a ministry and exhaust all the potentialities of parliamentarianism. Without doing that the CPM cannot possibly expose the limits of this form of 'struggle'. As for the CPI in Kerala, it is said it is trying to exhaust these possibilities. They call it carrying out of the bourgeois democratic revolution. As such, they say, the CPM should have had nothing to object, because all the measures the CPI-led alliance is taking (forget the CRP) should have been taken by the CPM itself. The benevolence with which the bourgeoisie of the country are viewing the present Kerala affairs—the Establishment papers, the industrialists, the merchants and Mrs Gandhi's Congress—is not a bit surprising. They are using the Menon Ministry to fulfil their role by proxy.

FantAsia

A correspondent writes from New Delhi :

Shifts in India's foreign non-policy often originate between the lines of slovenly official notes which go into stodgy, innocuous but authoritative publications like the Ministry of External Affairs' annual report for 1969-70. One comes across on Page 5 an enigmatic sentence which in effect amounts to India's open canvassing of support to Russia's claim to be an Asian power. India has been selling this line for a long time now. One might recall here the plea of the Indian delegate at the preparatory meet for the never, never Second Afro-Asian summit, at Djakarta in April 1964, in support of Soviet participation. But this time, the line is sought to be put across with a measure of sophistry.

The context in which the Soviet Union's dubious claim to be an Asian power is sought to be bolstered is of course Comrade Brezhnev's proposals for a collective security arrangement in Asia, spelt out in June 1969.

The External Affairs Ministry's report says rather cryptically in this context: "The reaction of most Asian nations has been one of waiting to see what the precise nature and content of the proposal is going to be. It was, however recognised that the proposal marked a new development of some significance and that is the declaration of the fact that the Soviet Union was as much an Asian as a European power. Indeed one of the developments in Asia has been the slow extension of the Soviet Union's bilateral economic, trade and cultural relations with a number of countries in Asia."

The Foreign Office has found some additional justification for the recognition of the Soviet Union as an Asian power. In the past, the only Soviet argument in support of its claim was that it was an anti-imperialist power and it gave aid to Asian countries. But neither of these could qualify a non-Asian power to Asian status, much less the Soviet Union three-fourths of whose population live in the European one-third and is Europe-centred politically and historically.

The Soviet Union did not insist on participating in the first Afro-Asian Conference in Djakarta in 1954 but was keen on participating in the second (called at Algiers in 1965 but never held). At the preparatory meeting in Djakarta for the second conference, many participant countries were for going by the precedent set by the first conference and the Soviet Union was not to be invited for the Algiers conference. The issue was as good as settled, but for New Delhi, it would seem. The Soviet reaction to the Djakarta decision itself was amusing. At first it objected to it but later settled for a face-saving posture. On July 28, 1964, a statement said that the Soviet Union "by no means deemed its participation in such a conference obligatory" and that "the Soviet Union cannot allow the question of its invitation to embarrass some Afro-Asian countries." It also pointed out that the Soviet Union had taken no initiative in raising the question of its participation

in the second conference. "It does not do so now and does not bind itself or others to any decision on this score." But soon came a volte face, following Soviet-Indian parleys on the issue and the Soviets began insisting on participation in the Algiers conference. Specious arguments began to be put across, often leading to absurd contradictions. For instance, on May 11, 1964, the Soviet Ambassador to France, Mr Vinogradov said the Soviet Union was a European country but part of it was situated in Asia. The Soviet Union was an indivisible whole. But *New Times* said on May 28, 1964 that the Soviet Union accounted for "more than the combined area of China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Burma and Japan."

As inconsistent and opportunist has been the Indian position. For, the late Mr Jawaharlal Nehru said at a press conference in Djakarta on December 30, 1954: "Soviet Asia was not invited because politically it was part of a European unit, namely, the Soviet Union." The Soviet leadership had no objection to it then.

The Soviet metamorphosis into an Asian power is a strange geographical and historical phenomenon. As for India's revived solicitude for Soviet Asia, it is a function of Soviet diplomatic and military support against China.

Fighting The Papa Docs

A grim chronicle of Duvalier's rise and reign in Haiti has just been published in England. It may be some time before the book reaches us, but some idea of its value can be formed from a review by a former British Ambassador to Haiti who calls it "a mine of information for future historians." For ordinary readers, however, there is already Mr Graham Greene's *The Comedians*. As for the new, factual and detailed dossier of horrors, one comment from the review seems eminently quotable: "It may seem that the chronicle of evil shows lack of balance in finding

no redeeming feature whatsoever in Papa Doc's years of power. I cannot help the authors out of this dilemma." Not surprisingly. Even his diplomatic position did not insulate the reviewer against first-hand knowledge of the Haitian nightmare. He was expelled from Haiti because of his protest, on behalf of the diplomatic community, against demands for money from foreigners made by the Duvalier regime and the thugs, the Tonton Macoute.

But in Latin America Papa Doc is distinctive only in degree, not in kind. With ill-concealed support from Washington and active encouragement by the CIA, other Papa Docs have risen to power. Some are still in power. One has only recently taken over in Guatemala. Euphemistically described as a "law and order man", Colonel Arana, the new Guatemalan President, has made no bones about the policy of repression he is determined to pursue. "We will break in two anyone who acts outside the law." And the law is simply the man who killed 3,000 peasants in fighting a guerilla movement in the north-east Zacapa region of the country. The law is also the CIA which in 1954 sabotaged the only progressive government Guatemala has known.

What has been happening and will now be intensified in Guatemala is large-scale, standard practice in Brazil, where the military regime has recently mounted a gruesome campaign of terror to root out all left-wing forces. The most sinister weapon employed is torture of people arrested on suspicion. There have been increasing waves of arrests during the last eight months. It has been suggested that some generals have found it advantageous to use the anti-communist repressive machinery in order to maintain their positions against rivals. The effect has been to make the arrests and torture more widespread and virulent. Two months ago the military authorities asked all owners of blocks of flats and caretakers to collaborate in a hunt for "communist cells" by denouncing "suspicious"

tenants. The citizens of this exemplary piece of the Free World were simply asked to spy on their neighbours. They were advised to look closely at the backgrounds and activities of all people who held short leases.

Many cases of torture have been reported, but few as detailed as that of a Brazilian Franciscan nun recently freed by the Brazilian military regime in exchange for the release of the Japanese Consul-General in Sao Paulo who had been kidnapped by an urban guerilla group. Mother Borges da Silveira, aged 43, told reporters in Mexico that the Brazilian military police had attached coils to her body to run an electric current. "I screamed when they gave me electric shocks but they laughed at me and said there would be many priests and nuns tortured like me and no one would help us." One of the arrested priests tried to commit suicide by slashing his arm with a razor "after he had been tortured for 72 hours with submersion in a bucket of water, electric shocks and no food." As Mother da Silveira pointed out, none of the priests and nuns had been engaged in any kind of what might be described as insurrectionary or terrorist activities. Their only crime was that some of them had tried to help people in distress. And some of these people may have been connected with left-wing political groups.

Similar atrocities are being committed by other Papa Docs. It is against this background that the left-wing activities in Latin America must be viewed. When a foreign diplomat is kidnapped by a guerilla group it may ordinarily seem a curious form of revolutionary struggle. But it is a desperate act against all-out repression. And it has been seen to work. A number of political prisoners, who would have been killed by unrelenting torture, have been freed in exchange for the release of kidnapped diplomats. One weakness of the guerilla movements in Latin America is that they are mostly urban and conducted by middle class youth. Without wider mass participation, they may

remain ineffectual against the CIA-backed juntas. But there can be no doubt about the courage and dedication of the young revolutionaries.

Erfurt And After

When the East German Prime Minister, Herr Willi Stoph, met the West German Chancellor, Herr Willy Brandt at Erfurt there was little chance of a change in the status quo in Europe which suits everybody well. What could be considered was how to make the de facto situation which is there for over two decades more bearable for the Germans. To the extent it helped overcome the psychological barrier and led to the agreement to hold the second conference in the West German town of Kassel, the Erfurt meeting was welcomed by Germans of both States, except Kiesinger, Springer and the like. Beyond this, there were only utterances of platitudes. It may be because neither Stoph nor Brandt thought it expedient to propose anything new. Stoph said what Ulbricht had earlier written to the West German President, Heineman: Until there is full recognition of the GDR, there can be no meaningful negotiations based on equality. Brandt sidetracked the issue to the extent it was possible by saying that Bonn would never consider the East Germans as foreigners and that the constitutions of both countries envisioned a reunified Germany.

Living in two hostile camps since the conclusion of the Second World War and under dispensable Big Power protection, the Germans of one territory cannot but develop suspicion for the other. The cold war over Germany and the face-to-face presence of Russian and American troops—which never led to a direct confrontation in spite of many provocations—have now largely outlived their usefulness for the USA. When Brandt became the Foreign Minister in the Grand Coalition, he noticed that although Bonn was per-

sisting with the obsolete Hallstein doctrine, America was busy wooing its eastern neighbours. But his Ostpolitik had a rather disastrous beginning. Russia found in his overtures to Prague a German plot to lure the Dubcek regime into the capitalist path.

Today, more than any other European country, Russia needs Brandt's help to stage a pan-European conference. European security has been a Russian obsession for a long time. The 1954 Moscow campaign for a conference on this line was to counter the move for a West European army and West European union. It seemed credible then, as it was widely believed that Russia had some alternative solution to the German problem, but the response to her call beyond her sphere of influence was discouraging. Busy with reconstructing its war ravaged economy with generous American aid, Western Europe could not antagonize Uncle Sam. It is now a different scenario. America wants to be closer to the Warsaw Pact countries. Russia needs Bonn badly. Bonn in its turn has been assured that the Ulbricht regime would be more amenable. If Russia renounces her rights as victor under the Potsdam Agreement and the U.N. Charter to intervene in West Germany against a military or political threat, she could hope for economic and technical aid from Bonn. Russia is in a hurry. She must clear up the outstanding problems with the Western bloc to ensure that it does not stir up any problem in case she attacks China. This the Chancellor understands well. And so his multi-pronged drive to have friendly relations with East Europe. He thinks that East Europe's exposure to the West would in the long run fundamentally change its economic character.

NOTICE

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Business Manager
Frontier

View from Delhi

The De-Stabilisation Game

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

ANY political strategy, including Mrs Indira Gandhi's game of de-stabilising the country's politics for doubtful marginal gains, has to reach the point of diminishing returns.

The massive cross-voting from the party in the biennial elections—Rajasthan and Jammu-Kashmir are the only significant exceptions—leaves one in no doubt that the bosses in the States can always have their way and the Central leadership no longer constitutes the "High Command" that it is described as.

Clearly, the leadership did not bargain for the setback in Punjab and Orissa. What happened in Punjab was but a recoil of Mr Inder Gujral's manoeuvre for his election. To offset defections from his own party, he looked at the dissident Akali candidate for some first preference votes in return for second-preference votes. Mr Gujral won and the dissident won and in the bargain, Mr Gurnam Singh was voted out. Even at this stage, it was inexpedient for the ruling Congress to have cast its lot with the rump led by Mr Gurnam Singh and in the process alienated the Sant and his Akali Dal.

In Orissa, the misadventure was worse. The deal with the PSP was supposed to make for a quiet change-over but the Rajya Sabha elections proved the undoing of many things besides the toppling plan. Mr Biju Patnaik, by getting a Congress-O nominee elected to the Rajya Sabha has openly challenged the High Command which denied him a teeny-weeny ticket, to dissolve the Utkal PCC and try its ad hocery there. The Congress-O could not have hoped for anything more. It can now hold the Swatantra Party to ransom in Orissa and force it to give up its plan for toppling the Hiten-dra Desai ministry in Gujarat.

In Kerala, it has been proved be-

yond doubt that minus the support of the Congress-R the CPI-led ministry is in a minority in the Assembly. Mr Achutha Menon has confounded the Opposition as well as the RSP by getting the Assembly adjourned sine die and he is not obliged to call another session for six months. The central leadership of the RSP might have decided to ask the Achutha Menon ministry to resign but the State unit has other stakes and might rationalise the decision to mean something else. In any case, the issue does not arise immediately, now that the State Assembly is not in session. As part of a deal, Mrs Gandhi's party is not opposing Mr Achutha Menon in Kottarakara and in return, the CPI has promised support to the Congress-R against the CPI(M) in Nilambur or Madai. The CPI-CPI(M) parting of ways has been strange. In Punjab, for the first time, the two communist parties found themselves backing the rival Akali groups and before long they would be backing the rival Congress parties. The Congress-O's anti-communist postures would make little difference to the CPI(M)'s strategy of securing its support wherever possible.

Bengal

Bengal still remains a question mark. Mr Jyoti Basu who would not respond to the Prime Minister's invitation for talks was desperately seeking an interview with Mr Y. B. Chavan and got it. All to request mid-term polls in the State in May! Mr Siddhartha Shankar Ray is giving everyone in New Delhi the impression that it is not Mr S. S. Dhavan or Mr Y. B. Chavan who is running the West Bengal Government but it is he. Mr Ray even managed to get himself mentioned as the possible successor to Mr Jagjivan Ram if the

latter were to resign the party presidency.

For once, Mr Chavan found it hard to defend the controversial utterances of the Lenin-quoting Governor of West Bengal whose association with a certain National Forum seems to have qualified him to talk so glibly about everything. The newspaper reports made it appear that Mr Chavan had defended Mr Dhavan in the Lok Sabha. But the record would bear out that Mr Chavan said that it would have been wiser for a Governor to have been a little reticent in such situations. There was even speculation in New Delhi that the Governor would resent Mr Chavan's remark and resign but it looks as though the Governor was happy reading the newspaper versions of the Lok Sabha discussion and concluded that the Home Minister had defended him.

There is little doubt now that Mrs Indira Gandhi had told Mr Jyoti Basu long ago that no fresh elections in West Bengal would be held before 1972. The CPI(M)'s threat of an agitation if no clear reply comes by April first week is not being taken seriously by the official circles. The CPI(M)'s threats are mere paper tigers. The other day, Mr A. K. Gopalan threatened that the Achutha Menon ministry would have to depend on bullets and lathis if it did not resign. The CPI(M)'s belief in extra-constitutional methods is less than half-hearted and the Centre knows this. And a paragraph in the Home Ministry's annual report should make edifying reading to the Politbureau on the eve of the agitation it is threatening: "Attempts are being made to modernise methods of crowd control so that the need to resort to force may be reduced to the very minimum." And again, about the high cost of tears: "The requirement of police forces for speedheat grenades, CN, is now increasingly met from indigenous production and production of long-range and short-range shells has made satisfactory advance. Tear smoke material worth Rs 26 lakhs is being imported during 1969-70."

March 29, 1970

Frankly Speaking

SANJOY

IT is strange, the confidence that is being placed in the Governor, Mr S. S. Dhavan. What more is he than a reliable agent, a much more sophisticated one than Dharma vira, of the Congress government at the centre? But his capacity for creating confusion is high. One Calcutta weekly came out with the story that it was the Governor who was writing Mr Ajoy Mukherjee's letters to the Deputy Chief Minister, but the same weekly now reports that Mr Dhavan is unhappy over some of his advisers—there are signs of a "conflict" between him and the Centre. This report would endear him to many leftists.

Let us admit that Mrs Gandhi has brought a rare finesse to the manipulations of her government and party, which confuse even Marxist revolutionaries—or, as the Naxalites would sav—hide the essential link between the two sides in sporadic outbursts of shadow-boxing. In this game, protracted and befuddling, the Governor will one day call a girl of 14 to expose her lies, to the jubilation of the CPM, and on another day visit Burdwan and the collieries to probe alleged CPM atrocities. He will call upon the police not to commit excesses—the excesses will continue. And, in the atmosphere of vendetta against the CPM following generated by the press and the stooge-cum-friends of the Bangla Congress, many people would overlook the excesses. All the time there will be talk, hysterical or complacent, about the danger or prospect of another government in West Bengal. Mrs Gandhi and her agents have learnt a lot about the United Front in the past two years to enable them to divide and rule. In fact, the March combination of Mrs Gandhi, S. S. Dhavan, Ajoy Mukherjee and (perhaps) Bhupesh Gupta confused the most veteran politicians and journalists.

In the present harsh and complicated period, the CPM makes the dissolution of the Assembly and a

fresh election its main political programme, coupled with a call to defend the gains of the workers and peasants. The headache is, quite a few of the erstwhile partners of the United Front do not want an immediate election and have other ideas about the interests of the toiling masses. They might try to get the gains in the countryside redistributed in favour of their supporters. In plain words, the land seized by CPM peasants might be re-seized by other parties, with police help or neutrality, and sordid inter-party clashes will erupt with a new violence. You won't be able to blame the Centre for that. That sort of trouble will reinforce the arguments for a prolonged spell of Presidents' rule. Besides, the main emphasis, as in Kerala, will shift to the precincts of the Assembly, and not defence of the gains of the masses. In working class areas the battle for trade union leadership will be re-joined. In the mean time the Birlas, for instance, would be able to do whatever they like. By the way, no party, not even the CPM, has made an attempt to probe why Mr Dhava was so cocky and defied, on the surface, some of the friendly parties, from the end of February when the Birlas became much too impatient with Calcutta.

The CPM leadership, it appears, has no viable long-term strategy. After the 1969 mid-term election, it was for a time haunted by the fear of Central intervention. Talk of confrontation filled the lungs of Mr Promode Das Gupta, and there was a general strike, an agitation against the deployment of armed Central forces. But the jitters were soon over. The split in the Congress Party, the election of Mr Giri were all great events and the leftist leaders in West Bengal, secure in the knowledge that Mrs Gandhi would be too busy manipulating her own survival at the Centre to intervene in the States, went about the business of strengthening their own parties by fighting one another. It never struck most of them that any party would risk quitting the Front and breaking up the rather cosy arrangements in the

Secretariat. That is perhaps why the CPM had no contingency plan. But Mrs Gandhi and her supporters of all shades have acted like Federalists, in the States.

It would be difficult for the CPM to work out an effective plan just at the moment, because of the great division and the continued confused thinking.

All this does not mean that the CPM lacks mass following. Lakhs of workers and peasants rallied round the party in the course of a year. But there was something phoney about this support. Wasn't much of it based on the fact that the police were neutral and even co-operative, thanks to CPM control of the Home portfolio? Such accretion of strength does not survive a period of intense repression, unless political education has been thorough, painstaking and meticulous, which it was not. The peasants and workers became conscious of their power, but the power was without political knowledge and

is yet to be tested in confrontations against the ultimate and most formidable source of repression, the State. Inter-party violence concealed this naked fact. In the cities, among the petty bourgeois elements there was too much froth and arrogance to inspire revolutionary discipline and fortitude.

One has to wait and see how the CPM rank and file and the numerous followers face up to the reality now. They should not expect much, in the way of farsightedness, from their leadership. The leaders are still enamoured of mid-term polls and all that, including petitions to the Prime Minister and the Governor. At most, there would be a movement of the type seen from November 1967 onwards. It won't mean sleepless nights for the administration. For, in this land of Gandhi and non-violence, non-violence does not count.

What about the other parties? Kerala has shown that they will rely

on unashamed use of force by the police and the Central forces to keep the militants in check. In fact, the reliance of the CPI on the CRP is breathtaking. Perhaps it looks upon the CRP as something like a Russian expeditionary force, sent out to contain the counter-revolutionaries.

Many are beginning to think that the disillusioned rank and file of the CPM might turn to the Naxalites. But in their intolerance of the "neo-revisionists", the Naxalites seem to have forgotten the rank and file of the CPM. Besides, we have an infinite capacity for quoting Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse-tung to justify our zig-zag paths to nowhere. That the immortals should leave such gaping holes in their Marxist armour for so many mice to wriggle in and out is a process of dialectics one does not understand. Meanwhile, the struggle for another election will keep the show going. Rediculous the sad waste of time stretching before and after.

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Confidence Trick ?

RAMJI

AFTER winning the confidence vote in the Assembly, Mr Achutha Menon, the Chief Minister, and his party, the CPI had reason to feel thankful. Accordingly, they expressed their thanks (of all sections) to the people! This was right in line with our sanctimonious tradition—after committing all sorts of dirty deeds, one thanks God for ultimate success. The masses were completely innocent of the entire affair. It was a resounding victory for the upper classes and a vindication of crass opportunism that has become the keynote of party politics in the country.

If sustained propaganda by the mini-fronters, enthusiastically echoed and supplemented by the leading newspapers, is any measure of the realities, the millennium has dawned in Kerala. It did, the moment the mini-front ministry under Mr Achutha Menon took charge. The ministry which has been unanimously hailed by the big press as the best one so far, in the whole of India, has been escalating its virtues; bettering the best, so to speak. And the climax came when the Chief Minister sought and obtained a confidence vote from the Assembly. The jubilation in the press has been hysterical; excelled only by the lavish celebration parties thrown by the top bracket affluent set, which pass muster for 'people' in the CPI lexicon now.

During the few days preceding the fateful day of the confidence vote, Kerala witnessed an unprecedented spectacle. It was the swift and spectacular manner in which the vested interests, of all hues, closed their ranks and presented a solid phalanx to shield Menon and his ministry. It was unique, this mobilisation of the classes in the interests of the masses for which the mini-fronters, allegedly, stand. Trivandrum was crammed with the most influential and affluent

section of the top dozen in Kerala: landlords from Kuttanad, top rung contractors, well-established black-marketeers, gold smugglers, etc. etc. and for good measure, the Church itself, to give the whole proceedings a garnishing of sanctity.

The main target of attention was the four-member Syndicate group in the Congress, which, toeing the all-India line, had announced their opposition to the ministry and threatened to vote against it. The Syndicate members were ruthlessly besieged. All local and outside influence was sought to be imposed on them. The Church played a leading role, locally. A friend of Mr Md. Koya, the Home Minister, got in touch with Mr S. K. Patil over the phone and pleaded for his intercession. Mr Patil pleaded helplessness. But, one big millowner of Madurai, who has interests in Kerala, was more successful. He got in touch with Mr Nijalingappa, who told him that the State unit of his party could act independently of the national decision. But, even before this, the discipline-bound members of the Syndicate Congress had capitulated and agreed to remain neutral. As for Mr M. M. Thomas, the sole MLA of the KTP party, who had defected to the opposition, it was easy to win him back, for a consideration, of course. He came back. The two Karnataka Samithi MLAs were also brought round, for a price. And Mr Zacharias of the CPI, who had defected, was made neutral through a process of harassment reminiscent of legendary Mongolian torture. All 'suspected' MLAs had a tight guard of mini-front volunteers round them. And this was augmented by the police of Mr Md. Koya and of the Inspector General of Police, who also has been playing active anti-Marxist politics ever since the mini-front ministry came to power. Thus, the "masses" in Kerala won a big victory inside the Assembly.

One feature stuck out a mile. At no time during the history of Kerala, not even during the notorious 'liberation struggle', had the moneyed vested interests rallied round in such

a comprehensive manner, in support of any cause. A mid-term election, with the Marxists gaining much popular headway, every day, was the nightmarish apprehension that had goaded them to rally round thus in support of the ministry. This and the abject servility of the ministry to the cause of vested interests. This section never had it so good. The end-result was that the class character of the mini-front stood out boldly, for all the world to see, in spite of the determined camouflage put up by the press through its attempts to invest it with progressive habiliments.

The Indicate Congress became one of the casualties in the fray. It was completely wiped out of the picture, thanks to its abject servility to the ministry. The identity of interests will be cemented during the coming by-elections. In Kottarakara constituency, the Indicate Congress is backing the CPI Chief Minister. In return, the mini-front has pledged support to the Indicate Congress nominee in the Nilambur by-election.

Wages of Opportunism

After the victory comes the wages of political opportunism. The terms have been more or less finalised. The newspapers which could never resist putting in a jibe or a tendentious adjective or adverb, while reporting Marxist activity have now adopted a poker-faced, matter-of-fact style while reporting the forthcoming expansion of the Cabinet; as if it were the most normal procedure, in the interests, again, of the masses. Thus, Mr M. M. Thomas of the KTP, and one of the two Karnatak Samithi MLAs, are slated for cabinet berths. The RSP leader, Mr Divakaran, is also likely to be included if the RSP high command agrees to it. It may be noted that the RSP did not toe the national line which demanded resignation of the mini-front ministry. Two other MLAs (one rebel SSP) and Mr Moraes (Independent) are going to be made chairmen of autonomous corporations: one existing and the other to be specially created for the purpose.

Incidentally, as pointed out by Mr George Thomas, the Syndicate Congress leader, in the Assembly, during the discussion on the confidence resolution, Mr Achutha Menon has evolved a new thesis: it is the duty of the opposition to keep the government in power. And Mr Menon had no reply to the open jibe by Mr Thomas when he recalled that, when ascending the gadi, Mr Menon had proudly announced that he would not stay for a moment in power if he owed his position to Congress support. But Mr Thomas was slightly outdated. For, apart from achieving an absolute like-mindedness with the Congress, the CPI in Kerala has announced a new political thesis: it is quite alright for the CPI to ally with any party which is ready for such alliance. All issues such as class character etc. have become irrelevant to the CPI here. It has become a pure and simple party of the Classes in the name of the Masses.

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Sikkim

Fair Elections ?

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

GANGTOK—The two-man Election Committee to conduct the elections in Sikkim is composed of two well-known Indophobes, Mr M. M. Rasailly and Mr Kunzang Sherab. It appears that they were specially chosen by the Chogyal and, if their brief was to create the utmost confusion, to deal in every kind of subterfuge that will eventually lead to the Chogyal's cherished "coalition", then they are working vigorously towards that end.

They have rejected three nomination papers of the candidates of the Sikkim National Congress for no reasons whatsoever, and for which, when asked, they refuse to give any coherent reason. The Sikkim National Congress is the opposition party, and demands a written constitution, fundamental rights, codified laws, and a high court with a charter for Sikkim, all of which are anathema to the Chogyal and his henchmen. It is shocking that in 1970 the Sikkimese people are being denied their fundamental rights which every Indian citizen enjoys. One wonders if socialism is only for India and not for her protectorate.

One of the candidates rejected by the Election Committee is one Mr Khusendra Prasad Thapa, of Indian origin. This family has lived for four generations in Sikkim. He contested the last elections on a Sikkim State Congress ticket, while his father contested on a Sikkim National Party ticket, and there were no objections whatsoever. Now that Mr Thapa has tried to file his papers to contest on behalf of the Sikkim National Congress, he has been told that he is an Indian, and that they, the Election Committee, cannot allow him to contest any seat in Sikkim. Now the question arises as to what is the status, political and legal, of this young man, thus summarily deprived of all by the command

of the Election Committee? Then, to what community in Sikkim does he (and many others like him who also originated from India generations ago) belong, having been unjustly deprived of his status, once established and recognised by law, at the whim, or deliberate intention, of the Election Committee?

This issue is of constitutional and legal importance in view of the fact that Tibetan refugees of yesterday's origin are being deliberately absorbed as Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepchas, and that, too, at the cost of the aboriginals and sons of the soil, but, of course, to please the Chogyal.

Then, there is the flagrant case of Mr Premlal Tiwari, whose proposer, so claimed the Election Committee, was not on the voters' list prepared by themselves (The number of voters has come down from 87,000 in 1967 to 50,000!). When it was discovered that he was on the corrected list along with 31 others whose names the Mondal had omitted, and that this list had been received by the Election Committee well before the final date for receiving it, according to the Durbar Gazette Extraordinary dated November, 20 1969, the Election Committee had nothing to say except that Tiwari's request "could not be granted"! With all the papers lying on their table, examined by leaders of the Sikkim National Congress and found correct, the Election Committee refused to vouchsafe any reply when challenged by them.

Yet, what about one Mr Lal Bahadur Basnet whom the same Election Committee has permitted to contest two seats? Mr Basnet, once a havildar in the Indian Army, was summarily court-martialled, jailed and dismissed for alleged subversive activities, and disaffection. He was later dismissed from service in Sikkim for having insulted the then Dewan, Mr Baleshwar Prasad by calling him a "bloody Indian" before pressmen. He was, later, jailed for one year in the Central Jail, Kathmandu, then deported from Nepal, whence he went to Lakhimpur, North Assam, and thence back to Gangtok to form a "Janata Party."

So, it appears that the two-man Election Committee feels itself much too strong. These two men were chosen by the Chogyal to go as "my Ministers" to the Kathmandu wedding recently, and when journalists present asked the Foreign Minister of Nepal as to why these men were accepted as "Ministers", the Foreign Minister was shocked and said that this description had come from Gangtok, and he felt helpless about it all.

Sikkim is an anachronism, and, as such, it is dangerous not only to

itself but to India and the whole border area. The administration is corrupt, ignorant, and based on a feudal system that should have been scrapped years ago. Is Sikkim to suffer because a very small group of sycophants around the court shout for "independence" which is for their own personal aggrandisement, while the people of Sikkim, those brave and patient masses, toil and suffer under manifold injustice? They are frustrated because there seems no relief at hand, and anyone talking about socialism will come under the Sikkim Security Act!

During the first two years of this aid programme, import authorizations totalled \$24.3 millions while only \$9.8 million merchandise actually reached Laos.

By the late 1950's, while lavish U.S. expenditures were convulsing the Laotian economy, writes Karnow, "occult American agencies," often in competition with each other were churning up the Vientiane political scene. Several clandestine organizations under American direction and funding operated in Laos for years. Karnow reports that in addition to the CIA, there was an American agency under the harmless name of the Programs Evaluation Office (PEO), a military advisory group with direct communications to the U.S. Pacific Command Headquarters in Hawaii.

Letter from America

The U. S. In Laos

ROBI CHAKRAVORTI

SAN Francisco: Senator Symington called the American involvement in Laos an "undeclared, undisclosed war". Senator Mansfield said that the possibility that the Vietnam war would spread into Laos "hangs by a fragile thread." Senator McGovern charged the military planners and national security people in Washington with "a divine right to deceive the American people."

All of them are right and yet, wrong and perhaps also a little bit dishonest. They are right in their worries, but wrong in refusing to recognize the logical nature of the American involvement in Laos. They are also, perhaps, somewhat dishonest for it is hard to believe that they did not have any inkling whatsoever of American involvement in Laos.

The issue whether the American involvement in Laos is secret or not makes good sensational copy, but does not make sense. A more important issue is that American military policy in Vietnam has not succeeded and a logical consequence of this failure has been the shoring up operations in Laos. Soon, one may

expect revelations of an "undeclared, undisclosed war" in Thailand as well and similar Senatorial cries of anguished surprise.

Joseph Kraft was one of the columnists who saw the internal logic of the American involvement in Laos which stems directly from its Vietnam policy. "Idiotic as it may sound," he wrote, "there has all along been a certain logic behind the official reluctance to make public what virtually everybody has known for years about this country's military engagement in Laos. It shows that the real difficulty in Laos is not that the Nixon administration refused for so long to come clean. The real difficulty is that the administration has no good plan for making peace in Southeast Asia."

The American involvement in Laos is nothing new, as Stanley Karnow has recently pointed out in an article distributed by the *Times-Post* news service. It goes back as far as 1954 when Washington, under the prodding of Dulles, launched what Karnow describes as "one of the weirdest examples of a U.S. aid programme."

The Kennedy administration was outwardly interested in the neutralization of Laos; but covertly, as early as 1961, it sent to Laos 400 Special Forces personnel commanded by Lt. Col Aito Kervuri, an American of Finnish extraction. Known as "White Star Mobile Training Teams," the Special Forces were assigned to train and supply Meo guerillas. The Geneva Conference was held in 1962, but American clandestine operations in Laos did not decrease; on the other hand, they expanded.

Secrecy

Recent reports published in newspapers point out different aspects of the secrecy surrounding the American involvement in Laos. Fulbright said that he had confirmation that the CIA used AID (Agency for International Development) as a cover for its operations. The *Los Angeles Times*, in an exclusive story, pinpointed the unit in the AID mission as the rural development annex which recruited and trained anti-communist guerillas. In the House of Representatives, Rep. Richard D. McCarthy, a Democrat from New York, charged five members of the Appropriations Committee with hiding from their colleagues figures on

the amount of money spent on military operations in Laos. The New York Times reported the dramatic story of the James Bond-like installation on a 5,860-foot high mountain-top, only 15 miles from North Vietnam and in a province which was granted to the Pathet Lao in 1954 as a regroupment area. Communists took it after a hand-to-hand fight.

As I mentioned earlier in this despatch, these scoop stories of the American involvement in Laos make relishing news. But the issue is not the secrecy, it is not even perhaps the breach of the Geneva accord, but the assumption behind the American policy in South-East Asia. This assumption has been that the communists in Vietnam could be defeated militarily and that a non-communist South Vietnam could be built up. This assumption has been challenged in Vietnam; it is facing a new challenge in Laos, for Laos, if recent reports are correct, is merely an offshoot of the American policy in South-East Asia in general and Vietnam in particular.

Nixon, if pressed on Laos, can certainly make a good case by pointing out that his predecessors had been involved in Laos. It is easy for him to argue and possibly win the support of the "silent majority" on the argument that the American involvement in Laos merely dramatizes the importance of South Vietnam to the security of the entire South-East Asia. He can even prove to American voters that the Nixon doctrine is

operating in Laos since the involvement of combat troops is limited and the brunt of the ground fighting is being borne by Meo tribesmen.

Nixon's problem is not so much selling the war in Laos to the American public, but selling it to himself. The American strategy in Laos consisted of a dependence on massive airpower and American trained, equipped and funded Meo tribesmen. All the recent reports from Laos indicate that this strategy has not succeeded.

In so far as American airpower is concerned, the Christian Science Monitor reported that according to a number of well-qualified military sources the bombings' effectiveness in cutting enemy supply lines and slowing down the North Vietnamese has been in general greatly exaggerated, "just as it so often had been in both North and South Vietnam." The CBS reported that the massive use of American airpower has not proved to be a deterrent; at best, it has only slowed down the advance of the communists. In ground operations, Meo tribesmen lost out to the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao, who have taken over the Plain of Jars and can, in theory at least, threaten the twin capitals of Laos, Luang Prabang in the northwest and Vientiane in the southwest.

What can Nixon do now? Bombings have not worked; clandestine support to a counter-insurgency army has failed. The so-called Nixon doctrine, meaning avoidance of direct, massive involvement in other countries' affairs has a limited test in Laos in the sense that American involvement there has traditionally been indirect, limited and clandestine until intensive bombings on Pathet Lao territory and Ho Chi Minh trails were added to it. And it seems to have failed.

The issue is: what can he do now? The ball, as the American saying goes, is now in Nixon's court. How is he going to play it?

Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

A little more money in the kitty of Mr Kutty may mean nothing much judging by the past performance of Calcutta Corporation. But the fact remains that the financial position of the Corporation has almost reached the breaking point and unless new sources of income are tapped the whole thing may just come apart at the seams leaving the citizens to their fates. The parking fee scheme which goes into operation after a long delay, through no fault of the Corporation, will yield revenue which is only a drop in the Corporation's ocean of need.

Much as we may dislike the idea of octroi, being a relic from the feudal times of walled cities, under the circumstances this may be the only way to find the money to prevent a total collapse of the city's services. The whole scheme, however, still hangs fire because the Centre is yet to give its permission. As likely as not the money, if raised by octroi, may be misused but that can be no reason for the Centre taking a 'holier than thou' attitude. When it comes to that, things at the Centre itself are no better.

The real point, however, is how long the Centre can be allowed to sit over local needs taking refuge behind the Constitution which like Hindu religion may mean all things to all sorts of people and like Hindu religion can be changed to suit the needs of the times. Apart from talk, however, of changing the Constitution, little is being done in a positive way to bring this about.

It is time something real were done in the matter. For one thing it is necessary to give up the tendency, common among all parties, of practically accepting the interpretation of the Centre in everything. The States are not vassals of the Centre to carry out its orders on all matters whether they like it or not. Without approving of it, it is possible to appreciate Mr Gurnam

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Singh's action in refusing to carry out the Centre's orders to collect agricultural wealth tax.

Why cannot Calcutta Corporation go ahead with imposition of octroi, if it really wants it? No doubt there may be law suits, but they take place on every issue. If it really wanted, the Corporation could have forced business to pay octroi with a little show of force with the UF Government in power, though things are different now.

It would have been worth watching the Centre's reaction after imposing octroi anyhow, leaving the Centre and business to sort out things as best as they could. It would also have exposed dramatically how the Centre is sitting on the necks of local authorities more than a thousand speeches and statements do.

For another, instead of periodic trips of pleading to New Delhi at least someone should initiate a move to formulate what changes are required in the Constitution instead of taking up each issue separately as it comes. With all the States eager for more power, such a move is likely to meet with wide support from many unexpected quarters. All this presupposes that those who talk of changes in the Constitution really mean it.

* * *

The great dialogue as to who broke the UF continues. The need for an immediate poll is not yet a live issue but no doubt will pick up soon. The Central Budget seems already forgotten. But the sins of the Centre are surely visited upon the States. Already prices of many articles have gone up. Though these may be said to be mainly used by the relatively less unfortunate of India's citizens, that in itself is a comment on the state of our development where tea, biscuits and tinned milk are supposed to be luxuries. What makes it worse, of course, is that a price rise anywhere leads to a sympathetic rise elsewhere

and already prices of other things have started moving up. In no time it seems the gains of the workers and employees under the UF regime are going to be neutralized and they will be back again in square one.

* * *

Whatever its other failings, Calcutta is a city of imagination. From time to time a sudden craze grips the citizens and nothing can cure them of it. In recent times we had the child lifting scare which gripped all, of whatever shades of political opinion they might be. Long time back I remember a scarce of a different type. In the summer heat some people had fainted on the streets as they have always been doing. Somehow, the rumour got around that this was due to eating cauliflowers. Immediately no one would touch the vegetable which found no buyers. Next year this was all forgotten.

The law and order scare is just passing through such a stage, with everyone using his or her imagination to build up a story. The most dramatic of these stories are connected with the fair sex which may have some meaning which for the time being escapes me. In the first case of the wife of a doctor, it was denied that any such thing took place. In the second, it appeared the law and order situation came in handy for an affair with the lady's lover but unfortunately the publicity spoiled everything and the truth came out. In the latest one, the teenager told her story with a sure touch as if knowing instinctively what would please the 'national' press. In any case she got her name and picture in the paper, though to have been consigned to a Rescue Home at the end must be something of a comedown.

Now that the scare has become something of a farce, it is to be hoped that in future the 'national' press will approach all such stories with a bit of journalistic caution and

people will face the real issues before them without a red herring being drawn across the trail.

* * *

Ever since a computer burnt down, the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation seems never to have recovered from the shock. For some time, the billing was erratic indeed and the consumer had to suffer. There is no end to the consumers' suffering as he is in the hands of a monopoly with all the options in its hands.

This was typified in the alleged attack by some employees of the Supply Corporation on a consumer's family. The court of course will decide the case, but the circumstances leading up to it are of interest to all. For several months it appears no bills were submitted in spite of reminders and hence all the trouble. Such cases are multiplying and wrong billing is a frequent occurrence with the Corporation. There are reports of other forcible disconnections even after payment has been made and this was pointed out.

What is probably the worst part is that the entire billing of the Corporation is becoming suspect. All over the city consumers are complaining that the bills have no relation with the actual consumption on the basis of wattage. This may well be true. The meters of the Corporation are mostly very old and fail to register correctly. It is also reported that where the Corporation is losing, new meters are promptly replaced. But where the consumer loses, repeated letters bring no relief. Either way the consumer always pays, and pays more.

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Land To The Tiller—II

SUMANTA BANERJEE

THE conflict between the party organization in the States and the Centre had all along marked the history of land reforms in India during the Congress regime. The Planning Commission recommended in the Second Plan that (1) so-called "voluntary surrenders" should be checked and registered by the revenue authorities before they could be accepted as valid; (2) that landlords should not be enabled to repossess, even by the tenant's voluntary surrender, areas greater than they had a legal right to resume; (3) those legal rights to resume should be very much restricted by sharply redefining the concept of "personal cultivation"—in every State the only permissible reason for repossession—to ensure that it included actual manual cultivation by the owner and by setting time limits and acreage limits to the resumption right.

And here is what the Fourth Report of the UN on progress in land reforms, 1966, has to say about the implementation of the recommendation. "A few States had followed the first recommendation (though implementation had again left much to be desired), two had followed the second and as for the third some States had newly imposed limits to the area landlords could repossess and had imposed a time limit, but none had done anything to sharpen the definition of 'personal cultivation'; this was one of the biggest loopholes."

New Group

While concentration of land in the hands of a few was driving the majority of the rural agriculturists to misery, there was at the same time a steady growth in power of a class in some villages whose interests were not necessarily identical with those of the landlords. They were the small and middle peasantry who, because of industrial development, irrigation facilities and other fringe benefits in

certain areas of the country, were able to develop into a dynamic group. But the Congress because of its old ties with the landlords, failed to rally them.

The results were obvious in the last mid-term poll in West Bengal in 1969. The Congress was routed in some of its traditional rural strongholds. The realignment of forces in rural Bengal was a significant pointer.

In this connexion an analysis by a communist economist in a pro-CPI Bengali weekly deserves note. The author, Mr Barun Gupta, thinks the defeat of the Congress was not brought about by the landless labour and sharecroppers as made out by some, but by the rising small and middle peasantry. The Congress got only two out of 50 seats in Birbhum, Bankura and Burdwan—the traditional strongholds of the party. The opposite trend was evident in the North Bengal districts of Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar where the party won 21 out of 40 seats.

Explaining the divergence in the voting pattern, Mr Gupta refers to several factors. He thinks that the success of the Mayurakshi and Damodar irrigation projects has released the peasants of Birbhum and Bankura from the old uncertain existence. Two new bridges connecting these districts with Burdwan—an industrial centre—have helped to bring in new ideas and the scope of extra-employment. The rising price of paddy also helped the peasantry to turn their economy from a subsistence one to commercial economy. All these helped to make the small and middle peasantry of the districts a dynamic force. The Congress, with its old links with the rich peasantry, could not rally this force, which found an alternative in the United Front. (Re: *Saptaha*, May 16, 1969).

On the other hand, in the North Bengal districts, the poverty of the

overwhelming majority of landless labourers and sharecroppers and lack of adequate organization made them helpless victims in the hands of the rich jotedars and tobacco and jute businessmen—the centre of Congress reaction. This again goes to prove that in the framework of parliamentary democracy, the poorest farmers are too much concerned with earning the next day's rice to make good voters for the leftists, and too immediately dependent on the favours of authority to risk alienating it. Moreover, the rich farmers or businessmen are the opinion leaders of the villages. The voting trend in North Bengal was therefore a foregone conclusion.

The links of the Congress with the rich farmers—the main beneficiaries of the green revolution in North India, its alienation from the new class of small and middle peasantry in some other pockets of certain areas and the possibility in the near future of the impoverished landless labourers exploding into rebellion—all these factors have prompted the more enlightened section of the ruling class to come out with positive steps to improve the lot of the small and middle peasantry and expand it to embrace at least a part of the disgruntled landless labourers and sharecroppers. Whether Mrs Gandhi's efforts would succeed would depend on her ability in the long run to break away from the traditional pegs in the rural areas, to which the Congress had hung on so long.

The redistribution of land would therefore upset the feudal relations in the countryside and strengthen the foundations of commercial and capitalist agriculture, leading to the emergence of a new elite from the rising small and middle peasantry of the rural areas.

Leftists' Motives

The motives prompting the Leftists to urge land reforms are also understandable. They have grown, through parliamentary methods, from small revolutionary groups into influential political parties. Power is a tangible goal. Progress till recently was barred by the sullen countryside. The

experience in West Bengal is a helpful pointer. So they have decided to support small property against feudalism.

All this sounds good as long as the communists do not insist on upholding land redistribution as socialism. Socialism means abolition of private commodity production, while land to the tiller could mean the perpetration of the same mode of production in the present political framework. Small-scale peasant production—even if not capitalist in itself—will produce capitalist tendencies under conditions of spontaneous development. But under conditions of socialist development and with the conscious effort of the State, this same small-scale peasant production may develop in a socialist direction.

At the present moment, no State in India can be described as under a socialist government. Not even the West Bengal Government can claim such a distinction. Under these circumstances, land reforms as envisaged by the ruling class and supported by the leftists, may lead to different results.

Let us therefore assess the possible effects of land reforms if implemented. It would be foolish to hope for too much from these land reform measures in India even if they are carried out according to plan. By enabling a tenant to become an owner-farmer, we would improve his position by increasing his rights, particularly his rights to a large share of what he produces. But we do not necessarily increase the volume or value of his products. The higher production in self-cultivated land—accepted by all—is possible only because of the great industry of the cultivating castes, not due to their ability to take advantage of new techniques.

Small Peasant

The land reform measures may increase the number and stabilize the position of farmers owning medium-to-large holdings. But they cannot, in the very nature of the case, give all farm families medium-to-large holdings. The majority would receive

small holdings. One can easily guess the fate of the small peasant. He must work all the harder and continue to toil so long as there is any return at all for his labour. He will not be concerned that in these circumstances his labour finally will become very cheap. The real meaning of his poverty is that as a producer he would become worth less and less. The ensuing poverty may produce the conditions from which tenancy or a condition closely akin to it will result.

The owners of small holdings, if they are to raise their income to the level of that of their more fortunate fellows, must seek additional employment elsewhere. But the outlet for such employment is severely limited, in the absence of abundant industrial undertakings around the village.

Thus the paradox of land reform measures in under-developed countries consists in the fact of providing land to the tiller and forcing the latter to seek extra-employment because of the inadequate size of his holding.

While the Bolivian land reforms neutralized the peasantry to some extent by improving their position and in the process, staved off a guerilla uprising, the limitations of the measures and the danger of an explosion in the near future, were not lost sight of by the experts. The U.N. Economic Survey of Latin America in 1959, six years after the implementation of the reforms, pointed out: "...it has been proved impossible to find employment—outside the rural environment or in less densely populated agricultural zones—for the large number of people who swell the 'active (agricultural) population' sector every year as a result of vegetative growth. If a solution is not found to this problem in the near future, the first beneficial effects of the land reform will be completely nullified by the spread of minifundia (small holdings), under-employment and an increasing imbalance between development in the agricultural sector and in the other sectors of the economy."

In Japan also, after the initial successful stage, the same features

developed. Writing in 1959, Mr R. P. Dore in *Land Reform in Japan*, says: "The land reform abolished traditional distinctions between rich and poor—between those who owned land but did not cultivate it and those who cultivated land but did not own it. The division today is between those who own and cultivate a large holding and those who scrape a living out of a small one. The former division was the categorical one of landlord versus tenant; the present division is one of infinite gradation, but in economic terms, the poles are not much closer together."

In India the reforms would destroy the old feudal relations and blur the traditional distinctions of social status in the countryside. But as levels of living will rise at the initial stages of implementation expected standards of living will rise too. The gap between the income and what the peasantry will consider the necessities will increase. Thus land reforms would contribute to an equalization of expected standards of consumption while bringing about only a lesser equalization of levels of income.

Apart from the fundamental problem of unlimited subdivision of land into small holdings and the ensuing poverty, there is the built-in resistance of the present administrative structure which might negate even the little relief that the small peasantry is expected to gain at the initial stage. The principal source of credit for the small farmer has been a disgraceful system of private usury. Till now, the Indian banking interests, both public and private, have failed to display real interest in providing for rural credit needs. It is yet to be seen, whether nationalization of banks will make any positive change in this regard.

The possible effects of land reform, analyzed just now, may not be felt in most of the States in India for quite some time, in view of the strong resistance by the State Governments and the still deep rooted feudal interests, to the implementation of the measures. The situation in Punjab is slightly different. New openings

for the productive involvement of agricultural labour in alternative occupations are provided by the small industrial undertakings growing round the area. Comparing the situation there with that in Kosi, which suffers from a lack of a similar industrial outlet for surplus labour, Mr Wolf Ladejinsky feels that the "overall level of living there (Punjab) of all classes of people is higher than in Kosi." But he admits at the same time: "The economic polarisation between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in Punjab is possibly sharper than in Kosi." (*Green Revolution in Bihar. Economic and Political Weekly*, September 27, 1969).

Kerala, W. Bengal

The implementation of land reform measures may be successful to a larger extent in West Bengal and Kerala, because of the pressure of a peasant movement in the former State and the stakes of the Government in agrarian reforms in the latter. These are the two States therefore which might in the long run face the next phase of the problem, the long-term effects of the policy of granting land to the tiller.

The communist movement in these States will have to formulate its agrarian policy, which should go beyond the mere slogan of land to the tiller. No general principles can be laid down, nor can parallels be drawn by quotations from Marx and Engels. If I therefore conclude with a quotation from Engels, it should not be misinterpreted as an attempt to impose a strategy. But it is perhaps worth pondering over the words he wrote in *The Peasant Question in France and Germany* (1894).

"Neither now nor at any time in the future can we promise the small-holding peasants to preserve their individual property and individual enterprise against the overwhelming power of capitalist production... We of course are decidedly on the side of the small peasant; we shall do everything at all permissible to make his lot more bearable, to facilitate his transition to the cooperative should he decide to do so, and even to make

it possible for him to remain on his small holding for a protracted length of time to think the matter over, should he still be unable to bring himself to this decision... [The greatest the number of peasants whom we can save from being actually hurled down into the proletariat, whom we can win to our side while they are still peasants, the more quickly and easily the social transformation will be accomplished.

"Accordingly we can do no greater disservice to the Party as well as to the small peasants than to make promises that even only create the impression that we intend to preserve the small holdings permanently... On the contrary, it is the duty of our Party to make clear to the peasants again and again that their position is absolutely hopeless as long as capitalism holds sway, that it is absolutely impossible to preserve their small holdings for them as such, that capitalist large-scale production is absolutely sure to run over their impotent antiquated system of small production as a train runs over a pushcart. If we do this we shall act in conformity with the inevitable trend of economic development, and this development will not fail to bring our words home to the small peasants." (Concluded)

Isadora

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

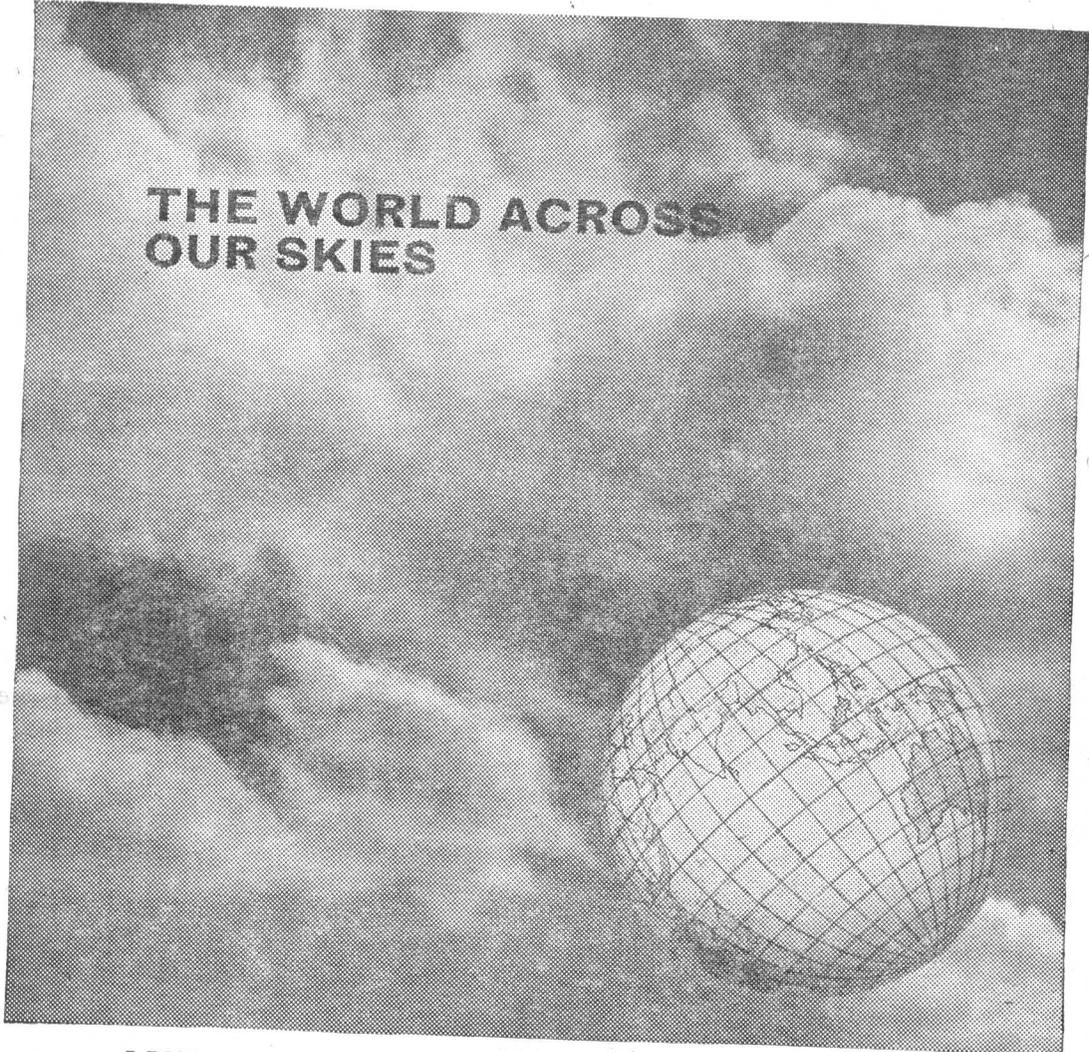
KAREL Reisz's film on the legendary dancer opens with a beautifully-photographed pre-credit sequence where twelve-year-old Isadora Duncan pledges herself to her muse and swears to banish the idea of marriage from her life. Curiously enough, Karel Reisz's dilemma seems also to start from the beginning, whether to present Isadora as a woman or as an exponent of modern dance. And still there is the other more important question, whether to keep the legend with all its gloss or to scratch a little and find out the truth beneath the exterior; the truth might conform to

the legend or might not, but the risk is worth taking. Isadora as a woman appeals more to the filmmaker and Vanessa Redgrave's brilliant acting talents help a lot to bring out the essence of Isadora's femininity and to portray the real woman born under the star of Aphrodite. In fact, she does it so well that her male partners look completely tame. James Fox's Gordon Craig has the appearance of an ill-bred Apollo, and his attempt to play it cool does not quite fit into the wild logic of tempestuous passion; Paris singer played by Jason Robards lacks personality and Ivan Tchenko's Esenin is spoiled by a violent overdose of rustic comedy. The love episodes, also have an element of fan-magazine crudity and nowhere is there any sign of Isadora's relentless pursuit of the divine bliss in all her affairs. The Russian episode, despite the excellence of the period design, is without any emotional content and when Isadora is hooted out of the Boston theatre, the director seems much pained to paint America in lurid colours and the entire Dance of Liberation is treated as a fanfare of mock heroics. But in spite of the faulty approach, in spite of the confusion and hesitation from which the script suffers, the film is salvaged by three factors: the magnificent performance of Vanessa Redgrave, embodying the sylvan charm of the enigmatic beauty, the clever editing style of Tom Priestly, a fluid fusion between past and present in the waves of memory, and the evocative music by Maurice Jarre recalling the classical grandeur of Isadora Duncan.

Letters

Lessons Of Laos

The publication of the article on Laos in *Frontier* (March 7, 1940) was timely. Prince Souphanouvong's bargaining power and manoeuvrability depended on his success in building up liberated zones on the basis of armed struggle. He could afford to



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join coalition governments or leave them only because he was firmly footed in the northern parts of Laos. Once, however, the Pathet Lao leaders made a mistake. In 1960 the rightwing coalition of the RPL-CDIN invited the Pathet Lao to join a coalition government. In order to demonstrate before the people their desire for peace, the leaders came down to Vientiane, true to the agreement, after demobilizing the revolutionary army and the parallel government organisation setup in liberated areas. While the elections were going on Souphanouvong and others were treacherously put to prison. They escaped and had to start from scratch to build up a peoples' army. The Pathet Lao did not commit the same mistake again.

United Front, to a communist, is both a forum of unity and struggle. China of 1927, Indonesia of 1965 and the Laotian experience of 1960 are cases in point that united fronts from above (without the communists having an armed base) bring disaster to the communists. On the other hand if they carry on the fundamental class struggle, even on the basis of a limited programme, they would ultimately be victorious.

Another lesson one can draw from Laos is that revolutionaries need not be touchy about any form of struggle so long as it serves the ultimate purpose. Elections and participation in coalition governments were resorted to by the Pathet Lao to convince the people that they wanted peace and progress for the nation while the rightists were lackeys of imperialism. Any form of struggle can be effectively utilised by the revolutionaries if only politics is in command.

No liberation movement these days can avoid interference by the U.S.-S.R. and the so-called neutralists in the shape of good words and gestures. A cry has gone up for the restoration of the Geneva spirit and the Control Commission at a moment when the revolutionaries of Laos are winning. The Indian ruling class is particularly panicky. They are serving the purpose of the U.S. imperialists by invoking the Geneva Con-

ference, i.e. the status quo. This aspect has been correctly pointed out by your correspondent.

G. MUKHOPADHYAY
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Government Employees

It is difficult to agree in toto with the assessment of the UF's performance in West Bengal reflected in one of your leading articles "Disunited Fronts" (March 7, 1970). What has been said about the propriety of a rise in the pay scales of the State Government employees (yet to be implemented) has little that is unexceptionable. The Pay Commission was appointed by the first UF Government more than two years ago and it could not throw the Commission's recommendations into the waste-paper basket on any pretext whatsoever without creating additional troubles in this troubled State. The increase in the DA of the government employees to bring it on a par with that of the Central Government employees was an imposition thrust upon the State exchequer by the Central Government and the UF Government could ill afford to act in isolation when several other State Governments had to toe the line and make the best of a bad bargain with their depleted resources. It cannot also be said that welfare measures languished because of increased emoluments of the Government employees and for nothing else: nor can it be said that such emoluments at least for the overwhelming majority of the lowest cadres of the Government service drawing a meagre pay constitute no welfare measures.

That the UF Government had been more generous to the State Government employees than to any other section of the community is not totally correct. It was the overwhelming support of the Front and the Government led by it that helped the employees of three major industries in the State to wrest from the unwilling hands of big business considerable increases in pay and pros-

pects. It cannot also be denied that the return of the UF to power in 1969 was a great boon to the poorer sections of the peasantry who greatly benefited by the legislative and executive measures of the UF Government aimed at the economic rehabilitation of the peasantry.

There is however no denying the fact—and this is much to be deplored—that the will to work among the Government employees is declining in inverse ratio to the mounting benefits, so succinctly observed by you. But this disquieting symptom is not confined only to the State Government employees. It applies more or less to all classes of employees both in private and public sectors, on fields and in factories throughout the country and the remedy lies not in withholding what helps to keep them above wants but in overhauling the economic and political structure which tends to perpetuate wants and privations.

It was also not correct to say that it was natural for the Front to lean increasingly on the Government employees because of the awareness of its growing alienation from the people, for the spectacular victories with overwhelming majorities of the candidates set up by a disunited and disarrayed Front in the recent by-elections in the State tell a different tale. In fact with all its drawbacks and deficiencies the overall performance—within the short span of a year and against the heavy odds of reactionary forces—of the Front which was a coalition of incompatibles is yet to be equalled in the country.

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