

# frontier

Vol. 1 : No. 28

OCTOBER 19, 1968

PRICE 35 PAISE

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PRINTED AT MODERN INDIA PRESS,  
7, RAJA SUBODH MULICK SQUARE,  
CALCUTTA-13 AND PUBLISHED WEEKLY  
BY SAMAR SEN FROM 61, MOTT LANE,  
CALCUTTA-13

## WAITING FOR FEBRUARY

ABOUT a dozen parties in West Bengal—no matter if the existence of some is largely notional—have got what they wanted. Congress leaders have got not only what they wanted but also what they predicted. Didn't they foresee months ago that communication difficulties would make elections impracticable in November? They can claim to have been vindicated by the fury of the floods in North Bengal. Communications have indeed been severely disrupted in more than one district. Response of the people affected to canvassing politicians is unlikely to be more kindly than the reaction provoked by Mr Morarji Desai's visit to Jalpaiguri. Tempers may cool in a month's time, but people who have suffered so grievously can hardly be expected even then to care a great deal what kind of people rule the roost at Writers' Buildings.

How many constituencies are so seriously affected remains, however, a matter of dispute. The Election Commissioner, briefed by Mr Dharma Vira, seems to consider polling in November unfeasible in all the 24 constituencies of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts as well as half a dozen others in adjoining areas. Mr Jyoti Basu, on the other hand, appears to believe that not more than 10 constituencies need present insurmountable problems. If the latter view is correct, not much harm would have been done in deferring polling in these constituencies alone and sticking to the November date for the rest of the State. But the Congress would have none of this. Probably it feels that a poor showing in the rest of the State might damage its chances in Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Cooch Behar where it did relatively well in the last general elections.

Besides, flood relief has its political uses, and it can be put to much more effective use by the Congress and likeminded parties than by the parties of the Left. The United Front, too, has been organizing relief, but its resources will be limited to what it can collect from the general, and a largely impecunious, public. The relief committee organized by the Congress includes most of the State's moneybags or their friends, who may not mind if some of their wealth given in the name of flood relief could also help in keeping even the none too radical Leftists out of power. No questions are asked about donation to, or disbursement of, election funds. How far the method will pay, however, remains to be seen. After all, the

Congress Government did not fail to show unsuspected generosity before the 1967 elections either.

With more than three months to go, speculation about the probable outcome of the February elections would be altogether pointless. Mr Atulya Ghosh seems as confident of decisive success as is Mr Promode Das Gupta, but such postures are perhaps intended mainly for the public—people cannot be blamed if they think that Mr Das Gupta and Mr Sundarayya are a bit heartless in their attitude to the problem of polling in devastated areas. Only one politician, strutting on an indistinct third front stage, has chosen to be more specific; indeed, his predictions are breathtaking in their precision. Apart from estimat-

ing Congress and United Front prospects, he has declared that his party will certainly win over 130 seats now that the elections are deferred. It will, therefore, hold the balance, which it will be prepared to tip in favour of the Congress if one of its members is made Chief Minister. If Mr Atulya Ghosh refuses to oblige, there will be President's rule till 1972. So Mr Dharma Vira need not lose heart altogether. In any case, with the alternatives so clearly and confidently presented, the parties directly involved need not wait until after the elections to start negotiating; it would be a considerable public service if the outcome of the negotiations were also promptly announced. Why wait till February?

near Teesta Bazar was obviously found too utopian. Instead there is now talk of removing the city of Jalpaiguri itself, lock, stock and barrel! The Yellow River, once the scourge of China, has been turned into its opposite. The huge San Men Hsia dam which achieved this miracle has been called "the most spectacular and significant single engineering achievement yet seen in eastern Asia." But that is for independent people. Periodic noises and electioneering suit us best.

## Strike, Hunger-Strike

In New Delhi four representatives of the union of Central Government employees have gone on an indefinite hunger strike. The Mahatma used this weapon for two purposes—to pressurise the authorities or in self-purification. Let us hope that the four concerned have been prompted by both. For, the leadership of the hapless employees has a lot to atone for. When the Marathi lawkeeper passed his thuggish ordinance the leaders did not believe that he really meant to be tough. Like people who do not intend to join battle they did not know when to retreat and make extensive and intensive preparations for the real show. As the machinery of repression went into action all over the country the union leaders funked and did not quite know how to defend those who had risked their jobs, lives and limb. Many of those affected most—for instance the postal employees—resorted to the work-to-rule tactic, subjecting the administration to a creeping paralysis. The tactic was so effective that it began to hit hard commerce and industry; bankers got into a panic and the business of administering the country was grinding to a halt. Just at the moment when it looked as if the Government would climb down the union leaders had a chat with Mr Chavan, were won over by his charm and called upon the employees to be on their best behaviour.

All through Mr Chavan and his colleagues—those few who had not been able to go abroad to earn goodwill

## The Deluge And After

It has come to pass. Every year floods will come and take their toll of life and property. Ministerial messages flowing with the milk of human kindness will be followed by dozens of aerial surveys, charity shows and street collections in the aid of the flood victims. Part of the collected amount will dry up somewhere in the pipeline and after some ritualistic protest from the 'Leftist' parties against the paucity of Government relief business will go on as usual.

The deluge in the north this month though surpassing earlier records of destruction has offered no variation of the set pattern except revealing the total rottenness of the thing called Government. For full 32 hours after the Teesta engulfed the sleeping town in the small hours of October 5 Jalpaiguri existed as if on a different planet. The only sign of the Government in the first 50 hours was a lone helicopter droning over the city. The Divisional Commissioner fled the city on the 6th noon to return only on the 8th. Meanwhile thousands of survivors perched on roof-tops and trees without a grain of food or drop of water. Helicopters requested from the Air Force arrived only on the night of October 7 though the IAF bases at

Bagdogra and Hashimara with their fleet of big MI-4 Russian helicopters were within 15-20 minutes flight distance. Even then flights by bureaucrats seemed to be more important than rescuing marooned people or dropping them food and water. On the 8th afternoon cooked food was distributed for the first time by the Government. It took another two days to deliver two water-tanks to Jalpaiguri. While people, driven mad by death all around, hunger and stench clamoured for food the Government airlifted four companies of Border Security Force and Armed Police together with their rations to Jalpaiguri to maintain "law and order". The plight of rural North Bengal had better be imagined. Thanks to official callousness, cholera has broken out in the five districts of North Bengal to complete what the floods began.

The failure of the district authorities to give any warning to the people in spite of the alarm sounded from many quarters is criminal, to say the least. This is not the time, we are told, for a post-mortem. So one cannot ask if the floods could not be prevented. The suggestion of the State Irrigation Department in 1965 that a flood control dam should be erected

or foreign aid—behaved in a manner typical of the pater familias of a Hindu undivided family. But alas! the wretched of the family are no longer so foolish and docile, though their leaders often are. Mr Chavan and his Government should know that the rebound, if there is no immediate settlement after the Prime Minister's return, will not be pleasant for all con-

cerned. The pity is that in case of a settlement the Government leaders will try to pass off as wonderful fellows who have let off the misguided employees rather lightly. It is time for both Government employees and industrial workers who have never had it so bad whenever they have gone on strike in the past few months to devise new tactics and strategy.

Mr Kantilal Desai's father. If we do not receive the mail, that is not Mr Chavan's concern: his portfolio is only law and order. If there is neither law nor order, well, did not the electorate vote with their feet?

Perhaps the electorate voted for this non-functioning anarchy. Perhaps the electorate does not deserve any better. For the failure is a failure in morality, and one which touches all strata. Irrespective of political labels, boundlers and opportunists have taken over as much the commanding heights of power as the lower depths. They feel safe enough, for they know the people are inert—and willing to put up with almost all indignities and deprivations. The mouthing of revolutionary talk in such a situation fails even as a joke, for it is only an apologia for impotence at the operational level. We may keep on writing, but it hardly seems possible that there will be any nodal point, and any sliding of quantity into quality. As of now, it does indeed seem possible that this pervading anarchy is forever.

## Non-Functioning Anarchy

Till about a few weeks ago it would still have been possible to describe India as a functioning, anarchy. No longer. The Central Government employees' strike and its aftermath have reduced general administration to a shambles, and well and truly we can pride ourselves for ushering in a non-functioning anarchy. As Parliament closed, the bulk of the Ministers went on vacation. The Prime Minister could not care less for the grievances of the employees; she left for her month-long Latin American junket the very day following the strike; the devastations in North Bengal and Bihar could not upset her programme—she cabled her sympathies for those suffering and dead: the former should feel succoured by the message, and the soul of the latter ought to rest in peace. The Deputy Prime Minister too went for his annual safari to London and Washington flanked by the usual entourage; he has returned with the non-news that the Americans are not going to fill our kitty this year: we could have told him that if he had rung us up. Mr Dinesh Singh too was out of the country, and Dr V. K. R. V. Rao, and Professor D. R. Gadgil, and, Mr M. S. Gurupadaswamy, and . . . . But why bother to go through the dreary list? All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. So Ministers will have their vacation, never mind whether time must or must not come to a stop.

Meanwhile, chaos has piled up on chaos. Communications over large parts of the country continue to be in disarray, mail remains undelivered, the discontent of the employees is

allowed to simmer at a dangerous level of heat. There are meetings of the Union Cabinet, but no decisions are reached. Important files, in a significant reversal of the Leninist doctrine, move one step forward and two steps backward. States are allowed to go their separate, autarkic ways in the matter of foodgrain procurement and prices. The Planning Commission is ticked off by the State Chief Ministers. The cost of living index having attained the height of 215, another round of adjustment of dearness allowance becomes due to the Union Government employees, but the Ministry of Finance keeps on quibbling and there is much futile dialectics over whether 214.92 is 215 or less. One branch of government talks of high-yielding varieties of seeds and burgeoning food exports; another branch refers with gloom to the fast-dwindling grain stocks and rising price trends. With more bravado than sense of responsibility, trade union leaders give calls for strikes which they are marbled to carry forward even into the second week. Assorted politicians start indefinite fasts on diverse pretexts, but the fasts end before dawn kills the night.

Nobody is willing to stick it out, whatever the course or the issue. Nobody is willing to do the hard spade-work for a job which, if it were to be done, has to be done well. And each one is for himself or herself. The floods in West Bengal are an irrelevant statistic for the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, just as the plight of a petty clerk, whose wages are below the level of subsistence, is irrelevant to

## The new Statesman

*A correspondent writes:*

The first Indian editor of *The Statesman* is out. A white editor would have got away with many things with the Indian owners and continued much longer, but that is another matter. Prior to the departure of the editor, after a meeting of the directors on October 12,—from which both the trustees-turned-directors were absent—various reports had appeared in the Press here and abroad about recent happenings in the organisation. Some people were led to believe that one or two editorials in connection with the dismissal of the United Front Ministry made the directors furious. It is hard to accept the contention that mildly worded editorials were the principal cause of the directorial ire, particularly when, soon after the return of the editor from leave, somersaults were managed in the same columns and elsewhere to charm the hissing industrialists. One may not be wrong in assuming that it

was the reporting of the United Front agitation that angered the owner-industrialists—the upholders of the Rule of Law who cannot accept in toto the recommendations of a duly constituted Wage Board. Had they been level-headed—it is hard to be so during recession—they would have looked up the other dailies in Calcutta and realised that, but for differences in style, what was called the matinee revolution by the cynical had been reported in almost the same manner—the reporters of even pro-Congress papers had learned to swim with the tide after some Red Guard like treatment by the public during the food movement in 1966. The similarity of reporting should have disabused the minds of the owners of *The Statesman* of the notion that the paper, one of the pillars of society from imperial days, had gone communist and become infested with reds (one of the charges made against the editor on October 12, it is reported, was that he had approved the appointment of three reporters even though he had been warned that they were 'communists'). Of course, readers and some veterans of the paper missed—the latter with considerable agony—the familiar photograph of the Police Commissioner directing operations against the hooligans from the Lalbazar Control Room. Not seeing that reassuring face, members of the Calcutta Club apprehended a revolution.

One does not expect journalistic common sense from industrialists—one particular group of whom in *The Statesman* suffer from a Masaniac (sic), McCarthyite sense of mission, and smelling a red everywhere, decided to rid at least the paper, if not Bengal, of the challenge of communism. As soon as a man from this fire-worshipping, fire-eating group took over as chairman of the board of directors, tough policies began to be enforced. It was the business of the editor to put up a fight for his staff, particularly the reporters, and later, to be at least neutral in the wage dis-

pute between the management and the non-journalists. But quite the contrary happened. Reporters and others who had collectively expressed support for the strikers were asked, by word of mouth, to state individually in writing that they had not gone on strike. Those who refused to do so had their salaries withheld. They are now a branded lot and a target of discrimination. A witch-hunt against 'communists' is quite on the cards.

So much for the independence of the editor about which a lot of stuff has appeared in the paper since the internal dispute of *The Statesman* became public in its correspondence columns. Should one believe that a newspaper owned by some of the biggest firms in India—or for that matter, a newspaper owned by a patriotic family—can continue to enjoy independence, buttressed by a board of trustees? The relationship between owner and editor is that of master and servant, to quote legal jargon. Editors who write according to the convictions and convenience of the owners say in self-defence, in private, that they are the paid literary agents of the latter. Of course there have been remarkable exceptions, and the master-servant relationship is obscured in times of political quiet. But as political tensions mount, as recession leaves no room for good manners, and as the Press barons take over more and more newspapers, the days of editorial independence get shorter. What has happened in *The Statesman* is a reflection of the polarisation that is taking place inexorably in the country. Maybe *The Statesman* will now begin to appear without clothes, but the readers should get used to the naked and the dyeing and not think of the two trustees who agreed to be directors though the other trustees refused to provide the figleaf.

Meanwhile, we are looking forward to a declaration by the politburo of the CPI(M) that to right the wrongs in *The Statesman* the UF should be immediately reinstated in power, and pointing out how left-sectarian Peking is in its assessment of the role of journalists in this country.

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## Confrontation ?

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

MR E. M. S. Namboodiripad's defiant stance against the Centre is an irritant to the Left Establishment's new-found detente with Mr Y. B. Chavan. The parties of the left and the trade union organisations they control ditched the poor Central Government employees on September 19. Mr George Fernandes can blame the AITUC for the failure of the strike and Mr Dange in turn can blame the employees' leaders for their indiscretion in going to jail just before September 19. But the progress of rice-and-curry unionism to the new affluent brand of terylene unionism has to take its own toll of militancy. The passive support the strike got from the non-Congress ministries in Madras and Kerala proved more valuable to the strike than all the sloppy sentimentalism of the political leadership which is now content to play its marginal role of pleading with Mr Chavan for a little mercy in dealing with the strikers. It is now sought to be made out that Mr Chavan is all for taking back the temporary staff served with strike notices but someone in the Cabinet has been vetoing it!

Everything would have gone well for the Left Establishment if Mr Namboodiripad had not turned belligerent. If the Centre goes over the brink to dismiss the Kerala Ministry, both the Left Establishment and Moscow would find it hard to support Mrs Gandhi openly, though such a step would improve the United Front's chances in West Bengal marginally.

But it is by no means certain yet that the Kerala Ministry would be dismissed, though some have already begun crying "Wolf!" It would have to be a political decision depending on the Centre's readiness to face the consequences that flow out of its brinkmanship. All that appears certain now is that the political preparation for an intervention in the future has

begun and the Ministry is going to be held on a short leash even if it does not want to force a showdown and get out.

Under pressure from the restive rank and file, the CPI(M) has to escalate the conflict with the Centre if the extremist elements are to be held back from going over to the "ultra" groups already functioning in the State. No wonder Mr A. K. Gopalan, as the secretary of the State party, has been queering the pitch both for Mr Namboodiripad and the Centre.

The Centre had always thought that some of the State governments had concepts of law and order different from its own. Mr Namboodiripad admitted this openly for the first time when he implied that the State Government knew better about law and order which was really its domain. This must have been a little too much for the Centre to stomach. But political expediency demanded a cautious approach. If the "hawks" in the Cabinet had had their way, the Kerala Ministry ought to have been dismissed on September 17, to believe the political grape-vine.

Law and order is a State subject but whether it has broken down in a State or not depends on the subjective opinion of the Governor. The Centre could have dismissed the Ajoy Mukherjee Ministry in West Bengal at the peak of the "gherao" stage. The Governor, almost as a rule, anticipates the Centre's political objective and sends a report to suit it. But there is a pattern to all ministry topplings since 1967. On not one occasion was the law and order argument invoked in justification of the dismissal of a ministry. The Centre had always tried to engineer defections to create minority ministries and prop them. When the experiment failed, it was President's Rule.

But the only occasion where the

law and order argument was invoked was in Kerala in 1959. The Congress needed to manage just two defections to topple the communist-led Ministry but could not pull off the coup in 28 months. So a "liberation struggle" had to be surreptitiously launched by the Congress with the blessings of its then President, Mrs Indira Gandhi.

The Congress is a pathetic quantity in Kerala now, holding nine seats in a house of 136. The State Congress leadership's calculation is that if the Ministry is dismissed the United Front would crack up and a non-Congress ministry with parties other than the CPI(M) but of course with the CPI would be possible with Congress support. But the High Command does not take this exercise in political arithmetic very seriously.

A deputation of the Pradesh Congress leadership met Mr Nijalingappa in Bangalore on October 3 and was in Delhi in time for the Congress Working Committee meeting to do the lobbying. Mr Chavan is reported to have told the deputation that Central action against the Kerala Government for its defiance of the Ordinance was not yet time-barred. But they had to make a total assessment before taking any decision. So the Centre would have to keep a close watch on how the State Government goes about prosecution of the strikers. The proximity of the mid-term elections would no doubt deter the Centre from embarking on any adventure in Kerala but then many decisions in the past have been contrary to assumptions of a rational approach to issues.

The KPCC leadership has been advised to go home and try a patch-up with the break-away Kerala Congress, which is the only other party outside the United Front now. In any mid-term election, the Congress cannot improve its position significantly but an alliance with the Kerala Congress would give it some manoeuvrability as an anti-communist compact. The alliance of the two parties paid off in the municipal elections.

So it is not confrontation yet with Kerala though Mr Namboodiripad's letter and his speech at Calicut were couched in aggressive language. The

Centre should rather await the CPI-CPI(M) mayhem in Kerala after the mid-term elections in West Bengal.

#### Pressure

The minimum consensus needed for status-quo politics has been achieved outside Kerala though the Ordinance on the strike has been responsible for a passing aberration. The CPI(M) in Kerala would not have thought of a hard line against the Centre but for extremist pressure. The party's all-India leadership might reluctantly give the clearance for an anti-Centre agitation in Kerala. But outside this there is a general agreement on letting the present political balance continue whatever the outcome in mid-term elections. Therefore it is hard to guess what Mr Chavan had in mind when he told a closed-door meeting of Maharashtra Congressmen that a serious agitation was likely to build up in November. Maybe his intelligence agencies are taking Mr Chavan for a ride because no major political party in the country has any fight left in it. If they had any, the two communist parties and the SSP would have backed the September 19 strike with a general strike call, something like a Bharat Bandh. But where was the will? In fact, the CPI was anxious that the strike-bound New Delhi papers should re-open in time to break the September 19 strike of Government employees. The only form of struggle one sees in New Delhi is deputations to Ministers and petitions. And where is the political crisis the left parties have been waiting for? A few more photostat copies of documents might be flourished in Parliament during the winter session but that is not going to achieve a mid-term revolution, not even a Cabinet reshuffle for Mr Madhu Limaye or Mr Dange.

Amidst all the sickening conformism, an important event in Andhra Pradesh has gone unpublicised. The State Co-ordinating Committee of Communist Revolutionaries has called its following to boycott the panchayat elections in the State. Considering the hold of the Nagi Reddy extremists in the rural areas, the decision is significant. But one reads only about the

murder of Harijans in Andhra Pradesh and nothing else. The Harijan murdered in Kachikacherla on Gandhi Jayanti Day is alleged to have been killed by three other Harijans. So it is not a mere Harijan problem. The tensions at the grass-root level need a socio-economic approach but someone is trying to make politics out of the

#### Kerala

## Young vs Old

RAMJI

**S**ECURING goodwill, patronage and good conduct chits from the Centre, at the expense of the vital interests of Kerala and of the popular base of the party inside the State, have been, all along, the political guideline of the Pradesh Congress. Throughout, the Congress leaders in Kerala have tried to catch the eye of the power-wielding bosses at the Centre, in the hope that a portion of it would be delegated to the Pradesh Congress leadership, over the heads of the people.

This technique has been very much in evidence during the tenure of the present United Front Ministry. Against every just grievance and accusation of wanton neglect by the Centre aired by the United Front Government, the Pradesh Congress has been over alert to show that it is more loyal than the King himself. Its most disgraceful performance has been the attempt to cover up the Centre's politics-inspired food policy towards the State. While the State has been persistently denied the full quota promised repeatedly by the Centre, the Pradesh Congress has thought it fit to blame the rice scarcity on the State administration. The Congress mounted a State-wide campaign against the UF Government for the fifty percent cut in the six oz rice ration, deliberately ignoring the short supplies by the Centre.

Anyway, Pradesh Congress tactics failed to pay off during the recent fur-

ore over the alleged 'disobedience' by the State Government of the Centre's ordinance to cripple the token strike by the Central Government employees. The State Government refused to take deterrent action against the employees in anticipation of their offence. Even then the Government was alert and took precautionary measures (though not provocative ones, as the Central ordinance had laid down), with the result that the agitation went off peacefully on September 19. But the hue and cry of 'disobedience' was unleashed by the Press and an atmosphere of crisis was soon conjured up and many felt that the Centre would teach the UF a lesson by dismissing it. This gave new life and vigour to the discredited Pradesh Congress leadership who began a vigorous sabre-rattling programme hoping the Centre would step in and make good their threats. And Mr Panampilly Govinda Menon, the Keralite Law Minister of the Union Cabinet, descended on the State like an avenging God, at the crucial hour. Mr Menon who has during his visits to the State always functioned as a rabid party propagandist of the Congress in flagrant abuse of his official position, outdid himself during the crisis. He defended the Centre's right to send the Central Reserve Police over the heads of the State Government and threatened that, if necessary, the Centre would send troops also and warned that the UF Government would be brushed aside if it did not

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behave. While he could promise the State a generous supply of police and the Army even, he could not give any assurance about despatch of food—isn't that the portfolio of Mr Jagjivan Ram? But the Law Minister spoke and behaved as if he had taken over as Home Minister. His advent and his intemperate language jacked up the hopes of the local Congress leaders. During the meeting of the KPCC executive, the members clamoured for more than six hours for pushing through a resolution demanding the dismissal of the UF Ministry. Only three of the participants, two Youth Congress leaders and Mr Panampilly, who also participated in the meeting opposed the resolution.

The frustration experienced by the Congress leaders has come on top of another. The plans of the old guard for mounting another liberation struggle have failed to take off mainly because of the radical, independent line taken by the Youth Congress wing, supported by the well-organised Kerala Students Union, a students' organisation under the Congress wing. The University Bill, now on the anvil, has proved a red rag to the Church and other organised vested interests who

have made an unscrupulous business of education. The bishops, in fact, met and issued a warning to the Government, that they would resist the imposition of the Bill. The Bill, as such, is innocuous enough. But since it seeks to curb the power of private management who have succeeded in making both the University Senate and Syndicate mere puppets in their hands to foster and safeguard private vested interests in education and ensure continuance of their stranglehold on the University, organised bodies like the Church, the Nair Service Society etc, the big monopolists in the business of education, have been campaigning vigorously against the Bill. Characteristically enough the Congress leadership is with them in this. But the Youth Congress, which is led by radical elements, forestalled the elders by passing a resolution in support of the Bill, without consulting the KPCC. And the Kerala Students Union has also supported the Bill. This has caught the Congress old guard flat footed. Without the support of the Students Union and the Youth Congress wing the Congress is in no position to mount a mass struggle similar to the liberation struggle in which the youth had functioned as storm troopers. The old guard is in a quandary. The youth cadres are in open revolt.

Meanwhile the Youth Congress leaders are working hard to capture power at organisational level. No longer are they cowed down by the old guard. During the last Pradesh Conference the Youth Congress elements openly challenged the political resolutions of the KPCC, which sought to saddle the United Front with cooked up acts of commission and omission. From the present trends it can be predicted that within the course of four or five years the organisational control of the Pradesh Congress would be wrested from the hands of the old, rusty leadership by the youthful elements and this might turn out to be of great benefit to the organisation. As it appears now, the youth wing could give a new character and content to the organisation which might help to rehabilitate it in popular favour.

## Letter from America

### Racism, Militarism

ROBI CHAKRAVORTI

**WATCHING** American elections this year is a fascinating experience. If you dig deep into the rhetoric of campaigning, America appears like a patient, lying on a psychiatrist's couch revealing its inner mind.

And what is being revealed makes the proverbial dirty linen look lily-white, washed by Lux.

Take, for instance, the so-called Wallace phenomenon. Pollsters claim that Wallace is gaining. At this moment, he represents about one-fifth of the votes. In terms of electoral college votes, he is ahead even of Humphrey. Now that he has General LeMay as his running mate, he has two strings to the bow: one string is the law and order, the other string is the military solution to the Vietnam problem.

These are the two prime issues in the campaign, and if one wants to be a little more outspoken than the candidates have been so far, the issues can be rephrased as racism at home and militarism abroad. One has always found a high correlation between the two. Those who want to depend upon police to curb dissent at home would support the Pentagon to the hilt to solve international troubles. In choosing his running mate, Wallace has made this fact quite dramatically clear. If about 20% of the American public has so far supported him, it is likely to increase after LeMay's addition to the team.

The most terrifying thing about the revelation of the American mind is that Wallace-LeMay is not so much an aberration as a significant part of the majority view. The rhetoric of Nixon may be different, but it runs closely parallel to Wallace's view of the scene at home and abroad. Nixon is projecting himself as a relaxed, wise, consensus type candidate indulging in generalities. Recently, some Humphrey supporters in Miami displayed a



plucked chicken before the Nixon headquarters. The point was that Nixon is afraid to speak out on issues like a plucked chicken.

If Nixon is not as outspoken as Wallace, it is because he wants to exploit the "mood" of white voters who are anti-Negro but do not want to be dubbed racists and who would like to take a tougher military policy in Vietnam but do not want to sound unreasonably militaristic like LeMay who is quoted as saying: "We must be willing to continue our bombing until we have destroyed *every work of man* in North Vietnam if this is what it takes to win the war."

Nixon, however, does not leave anyone in doubt about the trend of his generalities. He talks of "law and order", quietly forgetting that the issue of disorder is handled by the local police and in cases of emergency, by the Governor of the State. The President's role in riot control consists of sending troops when a situation goes out of hand. Nixon also talks about a new Attorney-General, obviously as a gesture towards the Southern whites who are upset about school desegregation and open housing.

If Nixon is taking the high road of consensus generalities, leaving the low road of controversial politics to Agnew, his thick-necked running mate of Greek descent who recently praised the Greek junta, he is doing this because he calculates that this way he can rope in the votes not only of a large segment of the radical Right, but also of the wolves in sheep's clothing—people who are racist where the Negroes are concerned and war-minded in international relations, but who somehow do not want to admit this in public. Racism is a dirty word, and so is wanton killing in a foreign land. Subconsciously, they may subscribe to both, when the chips are down, that is when some Negro families want to test the open-housing law and threaten to move into their own neighbourhood or when America faces up to the fact that it cannot win either war or negotiated peace. Consciously, however, they will balk at these thoughts.

### Twin Diseases

The startling fact is that the basis for Nixon's hope to win the Presidential election is no different from that of Wallace's surging strength. A large segment of the American public is infected by racism and anti-communism, with no holds barred when facing a real crisis or confrontation, and these two attitudes—American commentators choose to call them as "moods", a sweet euphemism,—are being exploited by Nixon and Wallace. In a way, Wallace is more forthright and honest than Nixon and the fact that he is gaining in strength is as much a tribute to his honesty as it is an index of the twin diseases of the American mind.

Nixon's campaign, incidentally, is a lesson in the use of Madison Avenue techniques in politics. In an interesting analysis of Nixon's campaign strategy, Joseph Alsop pointed out that there is a near-perfect fit between Harris' findings about the "mood" of the country and the things that Nixon and Agnew have been saying. Nixon made law and order an issue in the campaign because the Harris poll found that by a majority of 81 to 14, Americans are convinced that law and order have collapsed in the country. Organised crime too was given prominence in the campaign, for over 60% partly blamed it for the breakdown of law and order. But Alsop points out, the federal structure does not permit American Presidents to do a great deal about organized crime.

Alsop lists other so-called "issues" which Nixon picked from the findings of the polls, and concludes: "Altogether, the Nixon campaign would appear to be the first in our history to be fully adjusted to the era of the mass media. As with newly introduced detergents, poll techniques have been used to discover what kind of product the country wanted; and for packaging and selling this product, Madison Avenue's earlier ventures in the political field have been made to look terribly feeble and antiquated. Furthermore, it appears that this really is the product the country wants."

Two points are missing from Alsop's analysis. First, the worst features of

the American political outlook—racism and arrogant militarism—are coming to the fore, like tabooed feelings emerging under the spell of hypnosis. Second, the leading candidate, Nixon, is not so much leading the people, as is being led, and that too by the dangerous prejudices of the American people. He is pandering to the worst prejudices of the American people, instead of correcting them as a leader should.

Nothing is good or bad in love and war, they say. Add to this prescription American democratic election.

## On Czechoslovakia

SUMANTA BANERJEE

**M**ARXIST ideology in its day-to-day application by the Soviet Communist Party seems to have become an object of pragmatic manipulation. The series of steps taken by the Soviet Union with regard to Czechoslovakia, beginning from the attempts to create political pressure on Dubcek and his group to the gradual submission of the Czech Communist Party to the dictates of the occupying troops, have been justified in some circles as an instance of the Marxist principle of international solidarity.

But they should ask themselves whether the national interests of the Soviet Union and the aims of the international working class movement are always identical. The revelations at the 20th Congress of the CPSU—the sordid disclosures of the liquidation of Polish communists, and other instances of Great Russian arrogance towards East European countries—raised hopes of a changed attitude towards the people's democracies. But Khrushchev's genocidal handling of the Hungarian crisis revealed that the deeply ingrained Stalinist suspicion of autonomy was still at work and de-Stalinization concealed a stubborn and cunning obstruction to genuine socialist democratization.

Since then the Soviet party's illusory faith in the unlimited efficacy of manipulation from above and underesti-

mation of popular sentiments have marked operations in East Europe. The people's democracies were caught between Soviet determination to maintain control and the necessity to relax controls.

The recent Czechoslovak events demonstrated the fallibility of this Soviet concept of manipulations. The attempt to stem the tide of new thoughts there by force resulted in an ugly demonstration of tyranny masquerading as socialism. It raises at least two important questions worthy of consideration by all Marxists.

The first is the question of the scope and limits of intervention by the Soviet party in the defence of a fraternal ruling party in another State. The second is the problem of recognizing majority support for a ruling communist group in a socialist State.

In this connexion it may be recalled that during the last decade or two, we have seen a number of counter-revolutionary coups in several Latin American and African countries—coups where the USA was a direct participant—and blatant aggression by the imperialists in South-East Asia.

In June 1954, for instance, a Leftist government headed by Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala was overthrown by a CIA backed military junta. The then President of the USA, Mr Eisenhower, later admitted US responsibility for the coup—"There was one time when we had a very desperate situation, or we thought it was at least, in Central America and we had to get rid of a communist government." (June 1963).

In April 1965, a pro-Left liberal government in the Dominican Republic was overthrown, again with the help of direct U.S. intervention. President Johnson openly defended the action saying that he would "not allow another communist State in the Western hemisphere."

The tragedy of Lumumba of the Congo is still fresh in our memories. On all these occasions when a more militant gesture by the Soviet Union would have been justified the USSR contented itself with the moving of a few angry resolutions in the U.N.

The U.S. intervention in South-East Asia is more obtrusive. Towns in North Vietnam—a member of the group of socialist nations—are being regularly bombed by U.S. planes. The sovereignty of the country is not merely threatened by some distant possibility of aggression but is virtually under attack. The Soviet Union is of course supplying military aid to the North Vietnamese to withstand the attack. But there has never been any threat to bring the Red Army to the help of the North Vietnamese regime.

Nothing like this has happened in Czechoslovakia. Here was a communist Government, a democratically elected new leadership which was trying to introduce some reforms. Although the CPSU alleged that the reforms would lead to a restoration of capitalism—an assumption which has yet to find a ground to stand on—the Czechoslovak Government still affirmed its loyalty to communist ideals and retained membership of the Warsaw Pact. The direct presence of the U.S. imperialists was not felt here as it was in the Latin American coups or in Vietnam. In other words, the fear of restoration of capitalism or an imperialist offensive was a reality in the Latin American liberal regimes, in the Congo, and is still in North Vietnam, but not in Czechoslovakia where even the threat of such an eventuality has not yet been proved.

Yet we find the Soviet Union not so belligerent over open imperialist aggression in the Third World. It is, on the other hand, quick to march into Czechoslovakia at the slightest indication of dissent by a communist party. In its attempts to justify its omissions in the Third World, the Soviet party frequently resorts to the argument that revolutions cannot be exported. To justify the present action in Czechoslovakia it claims that the revolution there should be defended at all costs, even by exporting the Red Army to the country. The chain of ambiguities and contradictions in the statements made by the Soviet leaders is painful. As the ambiguities follow one after another, they parody each other—the silence over Guatemala and the intervention in

Hungary; the indifference towards the Congo and the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

This brings us to the second question—the need for heeding the majority opinion in a State where socialism has been in practice for the last 20 years.

It is amusing to note that some Indian communists accuse the Latin American guerillas of ignoring the majority and frequently advise them on the need to win over the majority before launching a revolution. Yet these same communists adopt a completely opposite standard when judging the Soviet attempt to impose a minority government over a reluctant majority either in Hungary, or in East Germany or in Czechoslovakia.

It should be remembered that the role of a communist minority on the eve of a revolution is different from that after it comes to power. On the eve of a revolution, the minority must take forward the movement at a rapid, stormy and resolute tempo, break down all barriers with an iron hand. The principle of parliamentarism—one should have a majority to carry any resolution—does not apply to revolutions. Had Lenin decided to take a plebiscite on insurrection in November 1917 the revolution would never have taken place. In fact, the Bolshheviks had a majority only among the numerically small and localized industrial workers and soldiers garrisoned in the Petrograd area. In the elections to the Constituent Assembly on the eve of the November revolution, they had secured only 25% of the total votes as against 62% by the petty bourgeois parties.

But once it captures power the role of the communist minority changes. Its duty then is to spur the working class to create socialist democracy. Democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism. The work should proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses. It must arise out of the growing political training of the people.

The East European communist parties had the chance to win the major-

rity of the people through this process during the last 20-24 years. They were in a minority in almost all the East European countries in 1944 when the people's democracies were founded. Without belittling their courage of resistance to the Nazis, one must admit that the establishment of people's democracies was possible because of the presence of the Soviet army on their soil.

If during the last two decades the communist parties failed to win the support of the East European population, and in some cases as Rakosi did in Hungary in 1956, even alienated themselves from the people by their ruthless methods, the responsibility for a reaction must devolve on them. Intervention by the Red Army is no answer to the problem. If in Hungary in 1956, there was the danger of a retrogression to a capitalist government, the fault should have been laid at the doors of Stalinism which had left behind a heavy burden of tensions and resentments and had provoked the natural, though misguided reaction. The best price that the Hungarian communists could have paid for their mistakes was to accept the possible reverses and fight on their own, without the help of foreign forces, to restore socialism in Hungary.

The need to pass through blood and fire and build up anew their bases among the people was more important than the shortcut to restoration to power with the help of the Red Army over the reluctant masses. Although the Hungarian Government seems to be confident today of its stability, is it possible for the Hungarian people to forget the blood bath in the streets of Budapest in 1956? It would be foolish to dismiss all those who resisted Soviet occupation in Hungary in those days, as fascists and mercenaries. The Horthy fascists and counter-revolutionary elements might have exploited the situation. But the stubborn fact remains that the Soviet army could find no Hungarians to fight alongside them against the Hungarian workers, soldiers and students who came out in the streets.

In Czechoslovakia too, it is now more or less clear that the majority

was behind Dubcek. The exemplary discipline showed by the Czechs in response to the party leadership's appeal for restraint, their stubborn refusal to cooperate with the occupation forces—all goes to show their steadfast support for the leadership. It belies the Soviet claim that Dubcek "headed a minority in the Presidium of the party." (*Pravda*, August 22).

If this majority supported reforms, alleged to be "capitalistic", however misguided they might be, one cannot think of a logical argument which would justify Soviet intervention. Granting that the Dubcek group was bent on restoring capitalism, if it had the support of the majority, it only proves the failure of the pro-Soviet faction of the Czech party. What were these "loyal communists" doing all these years to find themselves forced today to invite a foreign army to defend the gains of socialism? Nothing could be more humiliating for any communist party.

If the task of defending the gains of socialism was left to the Czechs, or to put it more plainly, if the two fighting factions of the Czech party—the pro-Novotny and the pro-Dubcek groups—were allowed to settle it among themselves, the image of socialism would have remained less blurred than what it is today.

#### Distrust of Intellectuals

While condemning Soviet action, we should at the same time have a second look at the developments within Czechoslovakia. The old Stalinist distrust of intellectuals, which considered every voice of dissent as that of treason, may still persist in the attitude of the present Soviet rulers. In tempering the brutality of the regime, the post-Stalinist leadership had not departed essentially from Stalinist doctrines. This explains their onslaught on intellectuals within Russia. The present dispute with Czechoslovakia also had a lot to do with the demands made by some Czech intellectuals for free exchange of ideas, for more daring experiments in art and culture. There is enough scope for suspecting that the Soviet party equated these demands for more democracy

with Western intrigues to go back to capitalism. But the Russians as well as the orthodox communists all over the world should remember that a militant intellectual class is always a dangerous passenger on any journey to the past.

There is also a disquieting feature in the recent trends of political and economic thought not only in Czechoslovakia, but in the Soviet Union and other East European countries. There is a growing insensitivity to the revolutionary developments in the Third World. An obsession with affluence may have been one of the motives behind the Czech desire to have better trade relations with the West. In the process, there has been an erosion of sentiments of internationalism. Sometimes this has led to racialism, as revealed some years ago by the attack on coloured students in Sofia.

This is however a general problem affecting the entire socialist bloc of Europe. The Soviet Union should be the last to claim the right to attack Czechoslovakia on the excuse that it is drawing nearer the West. In the absence of any norm for relations between socialist and capitalist countries, the problem of reconciling the normal demands of an apolitical population of a socialist country with the political obligation of international solidarity is assuming distressing proportions. The problem has stemmed as much from the uneven course of development of the world socialist movement as from the utter failure of the European communist ruling parties to politicalize their masses.

The essential task today before the leaders of the European communist ruling parties is to honour their old pledges to the people by establishing socialist democracy in their regimes and to combine it with an awareness of their obligation to the revolutionary movements all over the world. For this task, a new leadership is necessary. Khrushchev's successors belong, as he did, to the breed of leaders formed under Stalinism, in the hothouse of cold national interests and suspicions. Leaders of a different kind can only come up from a younger and more civilized generation.

# Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

UNDER the lamp—darkness. Thus goes a Bengali saying. And well might this be adopted by the West Bengal State Electricity Board as their motto. The affairs of this body are anything but bright. In fact they are getting murkier and murkier. It was only the other day that the chotta czars who administer the Board cut off the power supply of an entire town with magnificent unconcern. And now it is the turn of the Board's own employees whose strike after the failure of all attempts at a settlement was called 'illegal' and the now familiar Government procedure put into operation to cow down the workers. Notices in some papers ordering the workers to resume work or else had below them advertisements inviting applications for all sorts of posts. According to the Board's Chairman, the tactics have paid off and the majority of workers have joined work. Thus far things are clear though not very palatable. From here onwards things become unclear, to say the least.

Transmission towers have started falling like ninepins and promptly the Board's spokesmen have attributed it to sabotage and that too by the striking employees. How the Board reached this momentous conclusion except by pure deduction has not been revealed. By all accounts some of the so-called miscreants have been caught. All that the Board apparently has got to build up its case of sabotage against the workers is that it is a professional job which even they would not have risked doing, which to an unjaundiced mind would point to some highly qualified and trained persons, engineers for instance, to be behind the incidents rather than just ordinary workers.

It is curious, to say the least, that when the charge of sabotage is being made not a single saboteur has so far been prosecuted and his name and affiliation to any of the striking unions announced. Not a difficult job surely

if the Board is so sure of sabotage by its own staff. Meanwhile Mr Parimal Das Gupta, General Secretary of the Workers Union, has charged the Board itself with organizing the acts of sabotage.

The least that the Government can do is to hold an impartial enquiry into the whole affair and bring the facts into the light of day. Unless this is done and the charges proved, there is no reason why anyone should believe only the Board's statements and not that of Mr Das Gupta.

\* \* \*

While the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Calcutta Corporation are blissfully silent, more or less, the new Commissioner is more than making up the deficit of talk. Among the discoveries he has made is that nobody in the Corporation knows what is the number of persons employed by that unwieldy body. The reason given is that since there is no personnel department, no one can say how many people there are. Since the avowed aim of the Commissioner is to reduce the wage bill, the immediate step apparently which should be taken is to have a full-fledged personnel department and inflate the wage bill. It does seem that the Commissioner has been taken for a ride by someone in the Corporation. When payment of salaries is being made every month there must be something like a pay sheet and by simple addition the figure could be available.

The problem, of course, as the Commissioner must be knowing, is not of gathering statistics; these he could have had for the asking. What is difficult is to use them to reduce the wage bill.

According to popular belief in Calcutta, a coat left on the back of a chair can serve as a token of attendance in the Corporation offices for days together and the man need not take the trouble of coming all the way from his home and going back with

the additional burden of whiling away a whole day in the office with nothing to do. And popular belief, it must be ruefully admitted, has a good deal of truth behind it. A very scientific system of categorization of Calcutta Corporation employees would be to classify them as wholetime, part-time and casual but all with full-time pay.

But we should not grudge those who by their luck or a little palm-greasing are able to hold down two wholetime jobs at the same time. After all, in municipal affairs as in much else, we get what we deserve. The sheer inefficiency of the Corporation is equalled only by our own callousness where ordinary civic sense is concerned. Take wastage of water for instance. What house is there in which water, when available, is not allowed to flow down the drain unused? Take a look at the innumerable street hydrants. Some of course have the taps broken or just stolen for being sold as scrap for a few paise, such being the poverty to which even petty thieves are reduced. But where the taps are, they are found tied securely with strong or even wires to keep them permanently open so that all the time water is flowing out whether some one is at the tap or not. And just across the street will be young men interested in all the topics of the world and grumbling about shortage of water in their houses. Yet it does not occur to them to walk across and cut the string to stop the wastage or, if no tap is there, to talk to their Councillor and see that it is fixed up soon.

Or take the condition of roads. The incompetence of the Corporation in keeping them sound is of course monumental. But what is it that we the citizens and our future hopes, the bright young men whether of this party or that, do? Come any of the pujas, their enthusiasm is abounding but only till the lights are burning. As soon as the lights go off and the contractor's men take over to dismantle the temporary structures put up all over the city's roads, streets and lanes, they seem to wash their hands of the whole affair as if they had no hand in it and are not responsible for cleaning up the mess. The contrac-

tor's men hurry away as soon as they can pull out the bamboo poles. And all that is left is a large number of holes, big and small, in which some unwary passerby can have his foot or leg broken. And the holes remain, being nobody's business, until such time as they are filled up with sweepings or garbage and filth. And the next puja adds a few thousand more holes to the surface of the roads.

\* \* \*

In my last Diary I perhaps made a mistake in commenting on the West Bengal Government's scheme for removal of khatala. I should have known better. As it turns out, it seems one of those grandiose plans which the bureaucrats now and again throw out to the Press and public to show that they are still alive and kicking, knowing full well that they are not going to do anything about it. With hardly two days to go before the date-line fixed for removal of all khatala, not a single one was removed. Nor, for the matter of that, has the Milk Commissioner issued a single new card to those who were to get milk from October 15 at the time of writing.

On second thoughts, it seems, the Government decided to hold out inducements to the khatala owners to go out of Calcutta and loans have been offered for building khatala. We can be sure a little more of the taxpayer's money will go nobody knows where without any khatala being removed.

Incidentally, the report which appeared some time back in some Calcutta papers about police action against khatala was only partially true. There had been such action but not in pursuance of the Government's plan to remove khatala. The reason was completely different. The khatala in question was illegal in more senses than one. The gowalas had been occupying the land without paying rent for years and after a protracted law suit the land owner took the help of the police to evict them. And all of them and their cattle have been nicely accommodated in the other khatala nearby. I happen to know it because I have the misfortune to live near these khatala. Such is official propaganda.

*The Press*

## The Sheikh's Move

COMMENTATOR

THE coincidence is certainly fortuitous that the rains that ravaged North Bengal started on the day the Gandhi centenary celebrations were launched all over the country. Gandhi had said something not very original about the reasons for the Bihar earthquake in the thirties; people before him had tried to explain away natural calamities as punishment for human misdeeds. Those who still delight in speculating on the missing link between such visitations and human misery may find it an interesting exercise to ponder why the centenary celebrations should start with a catastrophe of such magnitude. The casualties in the North Bengal devastation are not known yet, and the papers are still competing with one another in putting the figure as high as possible. There is no doubt that the toll has been very heavy both in life and property; all that will be deplored. But the one death that will not be lamented is that of Mr Bhagat's speech at the UN that was buried under the avalanche of the tragic news from North Bengal. The selection of Mr Bhagat as the leader of the Indian delegation shows how low India's status has sunk in international relations; not even a full Minister is now considered necessary for the job, and all that the leader is now expected to do is to read out ponderously speeches prepared at the South Block. Obviously, Mr Bhagat was carrying out the Government's policy when he launched out against Pakistan. The ground for his speech at the UN was prepared at home by the release of certain documents on Mizo complicity with Pakistan which made the lead story for almost all major newspapers. It is no secret that India and Pakistan do not have the best of relations; reports of Pakistan's complicity with rebel Mizos are also pretty old hat. All that an airing of such tales can do is

to embitter relations further whose consequences, we all know, may be many. The echoes would perhaps have reverberated even now had not North Bengal intervened.

If the purpose of the sudden campaign was to undermine the Kashmir State People's Convention called by Sheikh Abdullah, the Government has achieved its objective. *The Times of India* has called it "a piece of political chicanery," for those who do not suffer from amnesia and can recall the history of the last twenty years and the circumstances in which the State acceded to the Indian Union cannot subscribe to the view that the people of Kashmir have had no say on the subject so far. The paper says that it ought to be obvious indeed even to those who have friendly feelings for Sheikh Abdullah that no useful purpose can be served by their taking part in a convention whose real purpose is to undermine the basis of Kashmir's relationship with the Indian Union. It is not clear what exactly Mr Jayaprakash Narayan, who has agreed to inaugurate the convention, hopes to gain from it. His bitter experience with the Naga rebels should have been a warning that a sentimental approach to major political issues can only lead one into a trap. What is really relevant is not the claim of the Plebiscite Front and Awami Action Committee that they want a lasting friendship between India and Pakistan but their belief that such friendship can be secured only by ending Kashmir's links with the Union and creating an independent State in the Himalayas with the support of foreign powers. That Sheikh Abdullah should have invited politicians in "Azad Kashmir" to attend the proposed convention only suggests that he is behaving like the head of a parallel administration in Srinagar. The more the Central Government puts up with this kind of be-

haviour the more it will encourage the Sheikh and his supporters in keeping the accession question open. New Delhi must leave the Sheikh in no doubt that he will not be allowed to play with fire.

*Patriot* says that only a few who command little following in the country have chosen to associate themselves in any manner with Mr Abdullah's stunt. Foremost among them is Mr Jayaprakash Narayan, who pronounces that there can be no solution of the Kashmir problem outside India and yet finds it necessary to share the propaganda platform of the notorious Plebiscite Front whose sole aim is to disrupt the nation's integrity and assist Pakistan in the furtherance of its territorial designs. Even if the Sheikh and the Plebiscite Front outfit manage to muster a presentable crowd at the convention, they cannot convince anyone who has been following developments in Kashmir closely that their policies and activities command any measure of support among the people

of the State. Mr Abdullah sought to add a new dimension to his anti-national campaign by bringing some of his admirers from across the cease-fire line with the blessings of President Ayub Khan to the Srinagar meeting. This failed because even the tolerant Union Government could not bring itself to countenance so brazen an attempt to organise an attack on national sovereignty and integrity. Neither Chief Minister Sadiq nor the Centre thought it necessary to prevent the improper meeting from taking place. The danger, however, remains that by communal and anti-national speeches the organisers of the convention may try to create new tensions in the valley. It is to be hoped that the State Government will be alert and forestall mischief.

#### Statesman and Swatantra

After the recent reorganisation in *The Statesman* it seems natural that the paper should have a long first editorial on the annual convention of the Swatantra Party at Bhubaneswar. It has not been able to support the Swatantra plea for an all-party government at the Centre because a government made up of the nominees of all democratic parties would agree on the virtue of democracy but on little else, on how they should proceed but not on where they should get. The mere exclusion of the Communists would not help much; other parties do not insist any less that theirs is the only true way to salvation. The paper advises that instead of looking for such short-cuts to power, the Swatantra Party should try to narrow its differences with relatively like-minded parties and come to a durable alliance with them; the effort may be more rewarding for them and itself, "as well as for the future of democratic politics in this country". It might bring the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh together, paving the way for a clear and viable alliance on the Right which would one day become a "creditable alternative to the Congress". By the natural process of reaction it would also promote an opposing alliance on the Left, and with the Congress as the Centre give Indian politics the

natural tripod of stability. The need for coming to terms with others will also help the Swatantra Party to shed some of the extravagances of its economic conservatism. Even the Jana Sangh, not to mention the PSP or the SSP, may want some of them shed, especially if it carries a little bit further the effort it has been making since the last elections to present a less benighted image of itself.

*The Hindustan Times* feels that the promise held out earlier of the Swatantra Party's steady growth seems dissipated. As the only genuine conservative party in India, it deserves to do better. It is the only party to offer "a secular and democratic alternative" to the Congress at the Centre. Several reasons are responsible for its present poor performance. The most important may well be that it is divided by differences of an ideological kind into two more or less equally strong groups. The party appears to have so far succeeded in papering over these differences. But there can be no doubt that the effort involved in this evasion has come in the way of a clear-cut party stand emerging on various important issues of the day. The resulting confusion among the party's following and potential following has contributed to the general public disil-

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lusionment with the party. The paper advises the party to avoid the temptation of joining hands with parties like the Jana Sangh, which have disciplined cadres but whose commitment to secularism is questionable. It should also try to widen its appeal and programmatic base which is now too narrow. This could be done by spelling out exactly what its commitment to a Gandhian ideology means. The recently formed Bharatiya Kranti Dal is engaged in a similar process. Despite this overlap, it is too early to talk of a possible merger. The BKD has still to establish itself as a party. However, cooperation through electoral adjustments in the States now awaiting mid-term elections might be a fruitful endeavour, to be followed, possibly, by efforts to evolve a common programme.

#### Mini-car

Those who are pining for a mini-car factory in the country may take heart from the report that the Prime Minister's younger son, Sanjaya Gandhi, has designed a small car and is waiting for a licence. In his weekly column in *The Hindustan Times Onlooker* has reported that Sanjaya made first one prototype mini-car and now has almost completed the second. Sanjaya visualises a capital expenditure of Rs 2 crores on the plant and altogether Rs 3 crores, including running costs, and production of 50,000 cars to begin with. The cost of the car to the consumer is expected to be around Rs 6,000 plus taxes. The car—unnamed so far except for a nickname—will be made entirely from indigenous material; so also will be the plant. Onlooker also reports that the mini-car actually looks like a mini-station wagon. It has a small engine in the rear and a luggage boot in the front; it can seat six persons. Onlooker's list has not been exhausted yet. With so many advantages, the greatest of them all being that it has been designed by the Prime Minister's son, the car may not take long in coming. The common man in India may now look forward to a car which will be within his means.

## Book Review

### Perils Of Hindi

K N R

THE modernization process in a developing society releases many malevolent genii, kept hitherto in check by a refusal to face the problems in an intelligent way. This is particularly true of India that is Bharat where the development of several cultural streams has always complicated the problem of integration. And by and large, the idea of a United India had remained in the pipedreams of the Brahmin priests, the Kayastha scribes, and the inevitable Marwari moneylenders. Only these upper castes, for several centuries, had peddled the theory of India's cultural unity by citing irrelevant symbols such as Kashi and Rameshwaram. When the question of a lingua franca for the country came up, many dormant issues sprang back to active life and ripped open and demolished the popular myths regarding Indian unity. Mr Mohan Ram, a professor-turned-journalist, has taken upon himself the task of providing an analysis of the language problem and the larger question—the hidden part of the iceberg—involving in Hindi's becoming the 'sole official language of India.\*

The author does not mince his words; he refuses to employ mural expressions characteristic of hack writing. The very opening sentence tells you what he is up to: "A bizarre permutation of Hindu middle-class ethos and the political and economic and cultural backwardness of India's Hindi-speaking midland threatens the country's distintegration in a decade or two." (p. 1). How does it threaten? The whole book is an answer to this question.

To begin with, the credentials of Hindi, which is nobody's mother tongue, are questioned. First, it is a mino-

ity language spoken by 30.4 per cent of the people. Even if Bihari and Rajasthani are classified as Hindi, only 40.6 per cent of the people speak Hindi and that too in five contiguous States of India's midland. Further, India is a federation of many nations and hence, the author argues, "India is not... a country of language minorities (that is language minority groups within a nation). On the contrary, it is a Union of minority nations speaking various languages (as in the Soviet Union)." (p. 12). The author demonstrates by an analysis of the theory of nationalities that in India "it is now a struggle between the minority Hindi nationality and the non-Hindi nationalities which together constitute the majority in relation to Hindi." (p. 19). Thus job and opportunity considerations are only marginal in the non-Hindi people's opposition to Hindi. On the other hand, the real issue is the political problem concerning the independent existence of various minority nationalities. The acceptance of Hindi, they believe, would put an end to their individual identities.

Further, the author argues that Hindi is spoken only by a small minority in the Hindi belt (the majority speak Avadhi, Bhojpuri, etc.) and it is this small group that has vital stakes in imposing Hindi on both Hindi and non-Hindi people. That is to say, the real agony of Hindi is that it is not even the language of the Hindi belt. Thus the acceptance of Hindi would mean, as noted earlier, the obliteration of other nationalities in India—their culture and ways of life. Mohan Ram takes this argument to its logical extreme when he says that if the diverse non-Hindi peoples have to accept Hindi as the link language now or in the distant future, they would have to accept the dress, food and culture of the Hindi people as the national dress, food, and culture.

Sedate gentlemen might categorize such statements as the outpourings of an agitated mind, but it would be difficult to deny the validity of the central theme, that is, the acceptance of Hindi would reduce the other nationalities to the position of satellites around

\* Hindi against India.

Mohan Ram, New Delhi, Rachna Prakashan, 1968. Price Rs. 15.

the midland sun. If the Hindi region had been the Prussia of India, then it could have become a rallying point for the other nationalities. But the author has no illusions about the character of that region. He calls it the area of darkness, where politics and culture are backward. It is the policies of the midland that primarily make Hindi a political issue, and have given rise to conflict situations. According to the author, the struggle is between the obscurantist, revivalist midland and the economically progressive and secular (in the sense of religion being personal and not communal) coastlanders. Mohan Ram's arguments are backed up by statistical data relating to progress and development in the Hindi hinterland and the coastal regions. The author points out that the obscurantist Hinduism of the Hindi region with its centrepiece of the sacred cow, and the Hindu chauvinist Jana Sangh with its obsession with a strong Centre deriving its nourishment from the Hindi midland, represent the politics of backwardness. The secessionist policies of the DMK are the extreme response to this situation. In short, the Jana Sangh-DMK

syndrome symbolises the conflict between the heartland and the coastland of India.

The author has also provided an exhaustive analysis of the origin and growth of the DMK, since the party's meaningfulness with regard to the projection of a "regional image" deserves careful consideration in an analysis of this kind. The history of the DMK since its inception is traced. The sociological factors that led to the DMK's emergence, along with the party's caste affiliation and composition, are given an elaborate treatment—perhaps the best so far on the subject. The author believes that since Hindi is a political issue which conceals the hegemonistic ambitions of the people who speak that language, the future portends an intensification of conflict between the Hindi midland and the non-Hindi coastland. The conflict may assume several forms. One of the indicators of this trend in the author's view is the total "regionalization" of the Congress party since the death of Nehru, who alone could find an all-India acceptability. The elections of later Prime Ministers have shown the ever-increasing role

of the regional bosses who have manipulated politics at the Centre by gang-ing up for specific ends. No other political party has replaced the Congress at the all-India level, or for that matter, is likely to replace it. Only regional parties have emerged—including the SSP and the Jana Sangh, which, despite their claims to be national parties, are in reality only regional ones—and here lies an important source of conflict between the Hindi States demanding a strong Centre and other regions demanding more autonomy. The author concludes rather cynically that "Hindu communalism and the all-India bourgeoisie are the best guarantee against India's disintegration. It is a race between fascist tendencies making for a strong centre and the divisive forces which want a weak centre. If fascism overtakes divisive forces in good time India's unity is assured, as long as the new equilibrium could be made to last" (p. 137).

In the final analysis, it is a persuasive and intelligent piece of writing, a formidable indictment of the strange goings-in in this country in the name of "integration" and similar claptrap.

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# Jatra Today

RUDRAPRASAD SEN GUPTA

LATELY the Jatra Shilpi Sangha sponsored a combination performance of the famous *Sonai Dighi*. There was no doubt good acting by Phanibhusan Vidyavinode, Panchu Sen, Tapan Kumar, Sujit Pathak, Makhan Samaddar, Panna Chakravarti, Kalyani Bhattacharjee and Sonali Goswami and some good concert, but the whole affair was hybrid. Many of the performers were oblivious of the fact that the stylized acting of *jatra* cannot sound genuine without the high-pitched delivery that is typical of it. Above all, the very idea of holding *jatra* on a theatre stage with its picture-frame and three-wall convention was ridiculous. The spectators too revealed a hybrid character. While most women and some old men were profusely shedding tears, some gentlemen frequently went out to smoke and complain that a *jatra* does not provide for any intervals.

So much for *Sonai Dighi*. Now a few words about *jatra* in general. One who has been to see, like a true culture-vulture, the *jatras* staged from time to time by the Jatra Shilpi Sangha, will perhaps say that the experience has been disastrous. The transplantation-operation (from the open-air dais to the picture-frame stage) has been disagreeable. One begins to have a premonition that the recent ventures of the Sangha may, ironically, prove to be the last of the suicidal leap of the *jatrawallas* and that, unless something is done immediately to prevent this leap, the days of *jatra* are going to be numbered.

While analysing the premonition, it may be pertinent to draw a comparison between the activities of *jatra* and theatre during the last two decades. The theatre in course of the last twenty years, one must concede, has earned a great deal of respectability and popularity. The prime factor behind this achievement has been not so much a sympathetic clientele or an understanding cultural ministry as an idealistic group of people. These people, and

their groups, have been working with an uncompromising ideal and a monastic zeal and straining themselves to purge the theatre of its puerile tendencies and earn for it a position of artistic honour. On the other hand, *jatra* has been, during the very same years, increasingly losing its glory. This degeneration has been mainly, if not wholly, due to a lack of idealism and intellectual approach on the part of the people at the helm of *jatra* affairs. The Establishment and the connoisseurs certainly have their share in the debacle. As in everything else, Government or semi-Government institutions have acted like philistines. Or why should Sabitabrata Dutta get a best-actor award from the Akademi while Phanibhusan Vidyavinode has to remain a persona non grata? Why couldn't *Sonai Dighi* or *Bangalee* fetch an Akademi award if *Byapika Bidaya* or *Naye Hath* were to get one? Why again did the Government spend lakhs of rupees for an uncouth building named Rabindra Sadan without ever caring even to visualize an open-air arena for *jatra*? The culture-consuming intellectuals too have been playing only folksy all these years; they have never really cared to find out ways to prevent the moribund state towards which *jatra* has been heading. Indeed the blame has to be apportioned properly.

But, in the final analysis, the ultimate responsibility lay with the *jatra* people themselves. They never cared to remember their self-respect; whatever they did turned out to be an act of self-disparagement. Why, for example, did they gleefully boast whenever any fossilized theatre-actor (and that too from the commercial theatre at its worst) or a fading film star joined their ranks? This tendency to cash in on the past glory of a spent-up Mahendra Gupta or a nearly finished Nitish Mukherjee was mercenary and did not have anything to do with art. The same catchpenny tendency is manifest when Naresh Mitra headed the list of artists in a poster of *Sonai Dighi*. To call it anything else is either self-deception or wishful thinking.

The *jatra* leaders, in their attempt to compete with the increasing popularity of the theatre and films, often forget that *jatra* is a different art form; to survive, it has to remain *jatra* at all costs. Regardless of this basic fact, they, time and again, tried to imitate the customs and conventions (tricks, sometimes) of the theatre and the screen. Thus to avert a crisis, they took steps that only made the situation worse. The case for *jatra* further deteriorated when some of the troupes tried to play modern. In their rush towards modernity, what they really achieved was only contemporaneity or topicality. Instead of trying to experiment with the form or the productional mode, they only brought some political or sociological data within the old framework of the *jatra* form. Consequently nothing could prevent these pieces from looking like an old dame trying a bikini or a mini-skirt.

These are the practices that have been ruining the cause of *jatra* during the last score of years. Now, as if to complete the wreckage, the *jatra* people are holding that nuisance of ill-rehearsed combination shows in which there are such funny yet dangerous compromises as the provision to accommodate two stars in one and the same rôle. One cannot believe that stalwarts like Phanibhusan Vidyavinode and Panchu Sen are ignorant of the danger inherent in performing *jatras* on the picture-frame stage. If the sponsors, with such steps as these, are after a kind of a status symbol and some pieces of silver, they should be told that they are playing Judas to the cause of *jatra*. Their present success at best would be only temporary. People will not for long, even for the sake of ego satisfaction, spend their good money to see *jatra* which is ceasing to be *jatra* at all. The way to salvation, after all, does not lie in the box-office.

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## Czechoslovakia

Mr Roy (September 21) and people of his like always manage to find ways to justify what they claim to abhor, —Soviet revisionism. Nothing is easier than to invent mystical causes, that is to say, phrases which lack common sense. Is Mr Roy not admitting, by using such a high-sounding word as "Reversionism" that he is incapable of understanding revisionist developments? In essence, are not revisionism, reversionism and restoration one and the same thing, one following the other inexorably? It goes without saying that at times individuals unconsciously drift from 'social-chauvinism' to 'centrism' and vice versa. Every Marxist knows, however, that classes are distinct, even though individuals may move freely from one class to another. Similarly currents in political life are distinct, in spite of the fact that individuals may drift freely from one current to another, and in spite of all attempts and efforts to amalgamate various currents. We are dealing here not with shades of opinion, which certainly exist even among the revolutionary left. We have here a trend. And not only a trend. It is absurd at the present moment to regard revisionism as a mere trend. Revisionism has ripened from an open, often vulgar, alliance with the bourgeoisie into social chauvinism, in other words social imperialism, (socialism in word, imperialism in deed) a term used by the German socialists and adopted by Lenin.

In Mr Roy's attack on *Frontier* nothing is more superficial than his political criticism. For instance, on opposition to the Soviet Union, he thinks that since the Soviet Union is opposed by China as well as the West their interests and outlook must be identical. Is Mr Roy aware of the fact that Marx and Engels talked of progressive opposition, contrasting it with reactionary opposition? In other words, they never lumped all oppositions together. The Congress is

opposed by both the Swatantra-Jana Sangh group and the communists. Are we to conclude from this that Swatantra and communist interests are identical and that opposition between the Congress and the Swatantra is fundamental and antagonistic? What Mr Roy ought to have explained but evaded is, how could a large section of the "revisionist" Right CPI and the 'anti-revisionist' Left CPI who are supposed to have fundamental differences come to see eye to eye on such a major question as the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia? Mr Roy has failed to grasp the very elementary distinction between appearance and reality. It is not surprising that Mr Roy, who wants to scare us by raising the bogey of a Peking-Washington axis, borrowing the phrase directly from the vocabulary of the Soviets, covers up the real Russo-American axis, as a thief covers up his misdeeds by shouting Thief! Thief!

Facts are stubborn, as the English people say. This is what even Fidel Castro, who lent his support to the Soviets, says— "... we are disturbed to see that neither the Communist Party nor the Government of the Soviet Union, nor the Governments of other countries that sent their troops to Czechoslovakia have made any direct accusation against Yankee imperialism for its responsibility in the events of Czechoslovakia. . . . we wish to express our concern over the fact that in none of the statements is a direct imputation made against Yankee imperialism which is the principal culprit in the world plot and conspiracy against the socialist camp". Castro's statement also reveals how groundless and frivolous is the left CPI accusation that China is not sufficiently aware of imperialist danger while the Soviet Union is.

Mr Roy is simply making a debating point in pointing out that while China supported the Soviet action in Hungary, she now opposes similar action in Czechoslovakia. The two cases are not at all comparable. The white terror against the communists that engulfed Hungary under the aegis of anti-socialist elements inside the

country with the direct connivance of the Western agencies across the border was totally absent in Czechoslovakia. Hungary declared neutrality, Czechoslovakia did not. In Hungary Soviet action followed, at the instance of local communists, to curb counter-revolutionary violence; in Czechoslovakia it followed bhai-bhai talks at Bratislava, with no local communists asking for intervention. It was like a bolt from the blue, not even comparable with Hitler's brazen attack —after all Hitler was a known bandit, not a perfidious enemy in the guise of a brother. Yet these reasons, though in themselves they are no less important, are not the only ones. The question is—has a revisionist any moral right to condemn another revisionist? Can a thief punish another thief? Is it possible for a revisionist, the twin sister of imperialist, to take anti-revisionist socialist action? Is not revisionism, by the very connotation of the term, counter-revolutionary? China opposes all export of revolution or counter-revolution, from one country to another, be it by the Soviet Union or America. The victorious proletariat can force no blessings of any kind upon any foreign nation without undermining its own victory by so doing, as Engels said. Which of course by no means excludes defensive wars of various kinds and support to the revolutionary movements in different countries. This is how the 81-party document understood it. As in imperialist war, so in the inter-revisionist war, the dogfight, so to say, the duty of a communist is not to side with this or that group of revisionists but to oppose all revisionists both at home and abroad.

These apart, American softness in regard to the Czechoslovak affair in contradistinction to the violent attitude towards the Hungarian affair will explain correspondingly, by negative in reverse, why China is vociferous about Czechoslovakia while she was an ardent supporter of the Soviet action in Hungary.

The Russia of 1956 is not the same as the Russia of 1968. The proletarian State now appears to be an accomplice of the big imperialist State.

Since 1957 the Soviet Union has made increasingly rapid progress in the art of being socialist in word and collaborator with imperialists in deed. Brezhnev and Kosygin are as far removed from Lenin and Stalin as heaven is from earth. Soviet social imperialism is the consummation of revisionism. For China to unite with the present-day Soviet Union is to unite with America for the maintenance of the status quo for the redivision of the world into spheres of influence. Concerning unity with the revisionists Lenin said. . . . "Your advocacy of 'unity' with the opportunists, with the Legiens and Davids, the Plekhanovs, the Chkhenkelis and Potresovs etc. is objectively a defence of the enslavement of the workers by the imperialist bourgeoisie with the aid of its best agents in the labour movement."

The mirror image of the pro-Americans is the pro-Soviets. The Czechoslovak events have justified all that China has said so long about restoration of capitalism, state of the whole people, peaceful co-existence and peaceful transition to socialism.

PROBODH C. DUTTA  
Dankuni, Hooghly.

Mr Arun Kumar Roy has indeed contributed something new to Marxism-Leninism — "Reversionism"! Revisionism and Reversionism may be two different identities for him, but no materialist and dialectician will admit it. This fantastic and illusory explanation would have delighted the late Bernstein.

For him Revisionism is the cause and Reversionism is its effect. He is teaching us that the cause will cure the effect! How can a revisionist party and revisionist government fight against the effect (of revisionism)? Heat increases the temperature. But heat cannot decrease it. The argument should be grasped by Mr Roy who is an engineering degree holder.

He fails to explain the basis of the "withering away" of the socialist system. "Withering away" of the socialist system will be nothing but restoration of the old production system and the old society. Had the ex-

ploiting classes been smashed completely, there would have been no material basis for revisionism. To be more concrete and precise, the Czechoslovakian party and Government utterly failed in abolishing the old production system and the old exploiting class and allowed the germs of capitalism to grow and multiply.

A Pentagon-Peking axis! The American imperialists are attacking the Soviet military intervention to safeguard the "granted" liberalism, freedom of speech and association. Peking is not simply attacking the Soviet intervention, but is giving a clear revolutionary call to the workers and peasants of Czechoslovakia for a socialist revolution.

BALRAJ SINGH  
Sindri.

### "Two Into One" ?

Apropos the letter "Two Into One" (September 21) by 'Readers', is there any defect in the recently published political programme of the NLF of South Vietnam? Compare it with that of the anti-Japanese united front forged by the CPC. Mao Tse-tung adopted two means to keep up the separate identity of the communists who were making a joint front with non-communist elements, so that the 'Two' might not turn into 'One'. First, the leadership of the PLA was kept under the party though its name was changed. Second, limited anti-feudal reforms were to be conducted in the liberated areas—reduction of feudal land rent and reduction of the rate of interest. Thus, the anti-feudal programme, and a limited one at that, was the only aspect of class struggle carried on during the united front period.

The NLF, on the other hand, calls for "land to the tiller"—surely a satisfactory anti-feudal political slogan in itself. Mao's united front was satisfied with 'reductions' alone. So far, the South Vietnamese communists have been able to bring in more politics into the NLF than the anti-Japanese united front in China could achieve.

It seems that Anna Louise Strong represents the extreme left ideas prevalent amongst a section of the Red Guards. The Cultural Revolution has given an outlet to diverse viewpoints against revisionism; and presumably Mrs Strong stands for a particular group in the whole movement.

G. M.  
Calcutta.

(Anna Louise Strong has since disclaimed authorship of the article.

— EDITOR).

### The Strike

The strike of Central Government employees on September 19 ended disappointingly owing to lack of proper leadership, organisation and mobilisation of the masses. Once more the working class has been betrayed and let down by the left leadership. Why did it fail to organise it on a mass scale? Why did the top leaders of the leftist parties who boast of bringing about revolution overnight keep aloof from the struggle? Why was public opinion not mobilised against the anti-labour, anti-people and neo-fascist policies of the ruling clique?

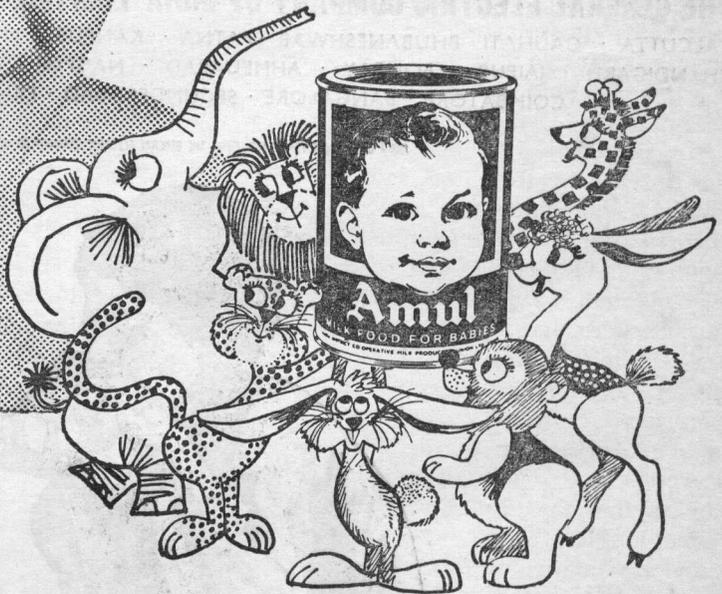
It is clear that the trade union movement is rotting with careerism and professionalism. The amendment in the banking laws and the ordinance prohibiting strikes by Government employees show that the Government is arming itself with every available power under bourgeois democracy with the ultimate aim of depriving the working class of their legitimate trade union rights, including the right to strike. No amount of ideological discussion and theoretical revolutionary preachings will help to tide over the present crisis. It is action that is wanted.

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