

# frontier

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## THE CHALLENGERS

WHAT the Syndicate was up to was predicted in View from Delhi dated June 22 and published in the June 28 issue of this paper. The political correspondent (who is at the moment away from Delhi and hence unable to comment this week) then pointed out that before Mr Nijalingappa returned from his tour abroad, the election of Mr Giri, the Prime Minister's candidate, had been taken for granted. But the Syndicate knew that this was the last chance to get even with a Prime Minister who thought her succession was a matter of dynastic right. And it got down to the job of confronting Mrs Gandhi. Mr Sanjiva Reddy is the kind of politician the Syndicate should back if it had any concern for the 1972 elections when the Congress will most certainly lose majority in Parliament. For her part, the Prime Minister would prefer a President who would look to her for guidance, who would dissolve Parliament when it suits her. The Syndicate on the other hand would like a party strongman who could play hell out of any Prime Minister of a coalition set-up even if it be Mrs Indira Gandhi. Mrs Gandhi thought that extra-party acceptability—sort of a consensus—would queer the pitch for Mr Giri, but the Syndicate decided to bring her under party control and made it known that extra-party acceptability was no decisive factor.

The general impression this week is that the Congress Parliamentary Board retaliated against the surprise suggestion of bank nationalisation and all that, but it seems that the proposals were a counter-measure by the Prime Minister who must have known what the Syndicate was up to and made an attempt to improve her image as a champion of the downtrodden and thus draw the leftist MPs and her followers closer together. The tactic may pay off with Mr Giri likely to become the candidate of the opposition. After all Mrs Gandhi still provides a liberal facade to the disintegrating Congress and happens to remember the word 'socialism' at times, whereas her challengers have ceased to beat about the bush, economic, political or social. They are semi-naked and unashamed. It is natural that Mr Sanjiva Reddy should be their choice. As twice Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, didn't he fight well the communist menace when the times were difficult? Nothing like a communist-baiter as President.

Mr Chavan—thou too Brutus!—who retains some of the swift, razor-sharp cunning of Shivaji, has stressed the 'sheer patriotism and ultimate wisdom' of remaining together—always with the winning side or the one likely to win. But from now on even the myth of remaining together will be given up. As Mrs Gandhi said, unity for what purpose? Congress factional politics, kept under a thin carpet at the Centre, will now surface like a hydra-head monster. The curtain is up and the spectators are waiting for the durbar drama to unfold. Will there be a Cabinet reshuffle? Why have the Ministers been asked to give up their summer exodus abroad? These are the questions now engaging the minds of the intelligentsia. There are of course some in this country who would not bother about who becomes the next President or what happens at the Centre at the party level because to them there is nothing to choose between the cholera and the plague, between Congress "progressives" and the rest. But lesser mortals who prefer cholera to plague, are excited by the sudden confrontation and would like the Syndicate to be routed.

*A correspondent adds:*

If Mrs Gandhi's economic wishes were horses, one could imagine that the country was poised for a spectacular spurt. But it is difficult to give serious thought to the 16-point programme as enshrined in the note she eventually got adopted by the AICC. Before expatiating upon the new programme and socialism, Mrs Gandhi should have told her party colleagues what her Government had done to implement the 10-point programme the AICC had adopted two years ago. It makes little sense to increase the number of points, by carrying old points over to a new programme. And it makes no sense at all why she should produce such a note. After all, it is her task to carry two-thirds of the new programme into effect. Knowing it better, the AICC has passed the package to the Central and State Gov-

ernments asking them to implement the socialist wishes, without unduly bothering about how and when. There is no urgency behind the request either, for the AICC knows where it stands in relation to the States after 1967.

Mrs Gandhi's concern over rural welfare is touching indeed. She wants home sites for the landless labour, Harijan uplift, increase in the minimum wage, drinking water for two and a half lakh villages and so forth. Is the Prime Minister prepared to mobilise men and money for the ventures? She wants to give special assistance to small farmers and their cooperatives through service cooperatives. Why then did her Government allow almost all the agricultural primaries to be frozen in default?

What surprised the outsiders most was not Mrs Gandhi's note but the fact that the Syndicate should kick up a row over her paper socialism.

Its members seem to have developed a mortal fear at the very sound of the word, no matter from which quarters the sound comes. It was Mrs Gandhi who herself put in the blunt alternative to nationalisation of banks: raise bank investments in government securities by five per cent. This should not cause much distress to the commercial banks, which, saddled with idle funds, are themselves investing more and more in government securities. If Mr Desai, the custodian of big business, were alert, he should have gladly welcomed the note and could have saved himself from obvious contradictions. He said, social control was as good as nationalisation. If that be so, why does he object to nationalisation? If social control be that good an instrument, why is it that credits now available to agriculture and small-scale sectors are no more than five per cent of deposit funds while they were expected to be fifty?

## Conspirators

The Chief Minister assured Congress leaders that there would be no trouble in Calcutta on Monday, July 14, but still there was anxiety—or wishful thinking—in some quarters and a few fixtures, sport and social, were cancelled. Some senior police officials carried the story to the Deputy Chief Minister among others that, according to intelligence reports, the Congress and the inevitable Naxalites were planning communal trouble. But no Bastille fell on July 14.

Leftist demonstrations and mass rallies, once in a while, do a lot of good to the morale of both party and people, whatever the attendant risks. But the trouble with the latest demonstrations was that there were no concrete targets. 'Conspiracy' is an omnibus term, the more so because it is used so often. The targets have to be defined and isolated. Not that there is no conspiracy. It should have been clear that the path since February would not be

paved with sunflowers. But from the beginning, in order to settle down in an atmosphere of seeming stability, some UF leaders had been soft towards the industrialists, the police and the bureaucrats and ignored blackmarketeers, profiteers and other entrenched interests. These lay low, like some nationalist newspapers, for a few months, and have now begun to bare their fangs, over gherao, suspension of a police officer, transfers, the alleged breakdown of law and order etc. The fact that the people had voted for massive change and would not be content with the status quo could not be ignored for long and something had to be done to answer their striving and meet the extremist challenge. But things started getting done to boost this party or that, for which even rowdies were mobilised, and the result is inter-party clashes at lower levels. This in turn has heartened the sharks. In the countryside jotedars are switching their allegiance to UF parties and

setting one section of the landless against another. Industrial tycoons are tending to ride high, the sweet reasonableness of the chambers of commerce has worn off. Blackmarketeers and profiteers are merrily active despite the three-week ultimatum. The police are their old selves again. The leniency shown to them after the vicious attack on a Durgapur college encouraged them to think of an organised protest—that firmness pays was shown in their decision to retreat. The lapses on the part of the UF had drawn a blanket over the silent doings of the vested interests and fixed attention on inter-party clashes. The issues are getting fuzed. The outrageous jotedar attack on the landless near Burdwan brought into sharp focus the basic issue in the countryside, but Ethora blurred it, as do the latest clashes in North Bengal and the Canning area. Now the 'Big Five' of the UF have decided to debate and fix the priority of items in their 32-point programme and launch campaigns against the conspirators as a way out of inter-party tension.

This, too, will lead to complications. Even without a profound Marxist analysis it is pretty evident that several parties of the UF represent interests which coincide, in many cases, with those of the established order. One can talk of the jotedars and the Bangla Congress, but are other parties altogether unwilling to lean on the jotedars in the land seizure movement? Nearer home, how different interests and sympathies converge was seen in the Sooterkin Street incident. The attack on the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* was idiotic and should not be condoned. But the bucketful of tears being shed for this organisation is nauseating, the more so in view of the screaming self-pity it is wallowing in. Would an attack on a leftist paper create any such fuss? But Sooterkin Street is different—it has many allies and admirers in the United Front also who would not care to remember the witch-hunt it inspired against leftist intellectuals and or-

gans in 1962 and the role this viciously efficient paper played during the January 1964 riots, the role it always plays against any democratic movement.

When some of the "revolutionary" leaders of the United Front hobnob with enemies of the people, the outcome of any democratic movement it launches to muffle inter-party contradictions will be uncertain. In the present set-up the CPI(M) says it can play a big role, for limited ob-

jectives, but it knows that if the role is too effective it can be isolated. There can be conspiracies within a conspiracy. Perhaps the wisest thing would be to compromise and unleash discontent in measured doses? In view of certain possibilities at the Centre, one may have to hasten slowly, as Mr Dange has always advocated. 'Parkalam'—wait and see—seems to be the watchword as the shadows lengthen in New Delhi at the time of writing.

## July 20

July 20 will be observed at many places as Vietnam Solidarity Day. It was on this date 15 years ago that the Geneva Agreements were signed. But why observe this day? Dienbienphu, yes, because it was a historic defeat of the French colonialists, because it proved that even the fanatical Dulles and his administration dared not upset the outcome of a national war of liberation and had to bow to a historical process that has turned out to be the biggest challenge to imperialism and neo-colonialism. But the Geneva Agreements, as subsequent developments made crystal clear, deprived the Vietnamese of the fruits of their outstanding victory. Geneva imposed the 17th Parallel, created an artificial division of Vietnam and helped the Americans and their stooges to start a war of aggression, a genocide, the brutality of which even Hitler would have envied. The elections which were to unite the people on both sides of the 17th Parallel in 1956 were never held by Diem. The International Control Commission was reduced to a farce as Diem and the Americans violated the Geneva clauses one after another with impunity. The armed forces of South Vietnam were reinforced by Eisenhower who sent 'special advisers' and arms and ammunition. Even John Kennedy, with whom many liberals all the world over fell in love, did not reverse the policy. Defeated in the Bay of Pigs, he went all out to crush

the Vietnamese. It is reported that towards the end of his career he was having second thoughts and had decided to withdraw some troops. At this point he was murdered—the murder still remains a mystery—and Mr Johnson look over. As Senator he was opposed to the war in Vietnam. As President he brutalised the Americans and, short of nuclear weapons, employed every means to win the war. He failed and had to quit, not as a man of peace, as some 'progressives' would have it, but as the worst killer the U.S. has known as President. His successor? Well, that he is behaving like a fox is not surprising. During the days of his predecessor, 800 tons of bombs used to be dropped in South Vietnam. Now the daily average is 1,500 tons as Nixon talks of peace.

There has, of course, been a change. North Vietnam is not being bombed. But the position of the Vietcong must be much more arduous now. The planes and forces withdrawn from operations against Hanoi have been redeployed and concentrated against the Vietcong, and despite illusions which are being nourished in Paris and elsewhere, the murderous war is likely to go on and on. The Americans know that they cannot win the war, but the generals, with their spurts of optimism whenever there is a lull, will not pack off soon. If they decide to, some of their Asian "allies" will swoon.

In Geneva, the Vietnamese were

let down even by their friends. If the object of the observance of July 20 is to urge the Americans to accept a similar agreement and to remind the world of how Geneva was shamelessly violated, it can serve little purpose. What the ethics of the situation demands is the total and unconditional withdrawal of the Americans and acceptance of the Provisional Revolutionary Government as the

legitimate authority to draw up plans for peace, elections, rehabilitation and reunion.

The world knows that it is not the Geneva Agreements but the spirit of Dienbienphu which sustains the almost mythical Vietcong to fight on, to move from one Tet offensive to another. They have something to live for and, therefore, something to die for.

## Dictated Diplomacy

After the somewhat traumatic experience in Bangalore Mrs Gandhi may not be in a mood for much new initiative in international affairs. But until last weekend the Prime Minister and her emissaries seemed unusually busy trying to discover new directions to regional cooperation. Mr Dinesh Singh might have drawn a blank in Nepal, but Mrs Gandhi seemed rather pleased with herself during her South-East Asian tour. Even more notable appeared to be the impressions that Mr Kewal Singh, the External Affairs Secretary, brought back from Pakistan. Correspondents in New Delhi reported the possibility of early Indo-Pakistani talks on a variety of subjects. As one of them put it, the senior Indian official had found "a strong echo" to his suggestions for renewal of contacts between the two countries.

Such optimism, however, found little support from Pakistani statements. The day Mr Kewal Singh returned to New Delhi with so much hope and cheer General Yahya Khan made it clear to reporters in Dacca that there was no question of friendship being established between the two countries so long as their basic disputes were not settled. And he disclosed that Mrs Gandhi had made no new proposal for settling these disputes. This was not all. Pakistani officials described India's complaint about the construction of a new road on their side of the cease-fire line in Kashmir as based on "an absolutely wrong premise", adding quite pointedly that India had "no claim in the

area concerned". To cap it all came the report from Washington that the USA was planning to supply 100 new Patton tanks to Pakistan through Turkey.

What then had made Mr Kewal Singh so blissful? It is entirely possible that the Yahya administration is more civil than its predecessor, but clearly it is not ready to resile from Pakistan's basic stand. Now that both the USA and Russia are more than ordinarily anxious to wean it away from China's influence, it can afford not to be particularly impressed by Indian overtures, which in any case do not offer anything new. In fact, it can afford to continue its close relations with Peking while deriving such profit as it can from American and Russian blandishments. How does then one explain New Delhi's stance? The only explanation is that India has been asked by Moscow and Washington to make a special effort to improve her relations with Pakistan—at least to such an extent as would make it possible for both New Delhi and Rawalpindi to join a regional alliance. Of course India is not prepared to accept any of Pakistan's basic demands, but she must at least appear willing to be friendly. And Mr Kewal Singh has properly tried to give the impression that things are going to improve.

Mr Dinesh Singh no doubt raised the matter of the tanks during his talks in Washington, but he made no strong protest—none of the kind familiar in the past. He did not dare annoy his hosts, not at a time

when he could see "a new era" in Indo-American relations, not at a time when the Russians are so convinced of the USA's peaceful intentions. After all, Mr Gromyko has not hesitated to reaffirm Russian interest in talks with the USA even after Moscow's loss of face over Mr Nixon's plan to visit Rumania. Who is Mr Dinesh Singh, or for that matter Mrs Gandhi, to upset the new strategy in Asia, a strategy jointly devised by the USA and Russia? Instead, their diplomatic initiatives must now be fashioned in the light of the master plan. Pakistan, however, does not seem anxious to fall fully in line; major contacts with Peking are continuing. India could have tried to arrive at a settlement with Pakistan simultaneously with attempts to reach an understanding with China. But that is not a part of the diplomacy dictated to the country; so it will be content with such barren moves as Mr Kewal Singh made last week.

## Stirrings In Spain

How enormously the resistance to General Franco's regime has been developing—a fact which political observers outside Spain have often underplayed—will be evident if a few frames are put together: the tenacity of thousands of workers of Altos Hornos who struck work for three weeks, the assassination of police Chief Mazzanas in retaliation against the death of an ETA (Basque nationalist movement) leader, and participation of 25 per cent of the students in political protests. All this may be considered a good beginning after three decades of passivity. Now there is consensus in the resistance movement that strikes of similar magnitude can bring down the Government. El Caudillo and his supporters fear most the Comisiones Obreras, the 'illegal' workers' commissions which came into being during the general strike of 1962. The commissions, which are run on a democratic basis from the plant level to regional and national committees, do not proclaim

any political affiliation, their objective being to develop as horizontal unions against the vertical unions represented by the Sindicato of the Movimiento Nacional—the only recognized political party in Spain. An instrument of the Government, Sindicato provides berth to elected representatives of workers and management. But unfaithfuls are liable to be purged and imprisoned as had happened to the communists and leftist Catholics elected to Sindicato posts. The Syndical Law which the Cabinet Minister in charge of Sindicato has promised to present to the Cortes is facing rough weather both in the Cabinet and outside. The Opus Dei faction in the economic ministry, the Vice-President and the banking community want to keep Sindicato under Government control, while Movimiento Nacional would like to have it under its patronage. The workers' commissions have condemned the draft of the proposed law as a fraud and threatened strikes and demonstrations the day it is promulgated. An alternative to the Syndical Law is also being prepared with suggestions flowing from factory committees to regional and national level. All this is an exercise in workers' control which is taking place in the void; but it will be widely read, and may teach a whole new generation (whom Franco had hoped to depoliticise as successfully as he had done their fathers) how to organize and plan. A section of the Catholic priests has of late come to the fore by upholding an International Labour Organization report recommending trade union freedom in Spain.

Among the student activists, a group of dedicated revolutionaries have organized themselves in action committees. Their schooling in Marxism enables them to look beyond bourgeois freedoms. They know that to be lured by reformist promises would help the Government to absorb them in the system. By integrating themselves with the workers they have given a new dimension to the resistance movement.

## Andhra Pradesh

# What A Contrast !

NARAYANMURTHI

THE handling of the violent agitations in Telengana and Srikakulam by the Congress Government offers a violent and striking contrast.

Violence is to be abhorred and put down at any cost not merely because we are a democracy but also because we are the Buddha's direct descendants. So says everyone, including our peaceable Home Minister, Mr Chavan. But, what is the practice? Of course, no one ever accused the Congress of consistency between its precept and practice.

The communists in Srikakulam made no secret of their preference to violence as the method to solve peoples' problems. Not because they love violence, but because non-violence never paid. But the Telengana leaders, all Congressmen, followers of the non-violent Mahatma, swore to carry on their agitation by peaceful methods but are acting through violent means only. Yet the communists are being hunted by squads of armed reserve police day in and day out, while the Congress leaders were given the utmost freedom to go and preach violence from public platforms and practise it in the most virulent form during the last six months.

The targets of the communists in Srikakulam and elsewhere in Andhra were not policemen or Ministers or any government property; their targets were the hated landlords and those who sucked the blood of the tribal people. They attacked those who violated government laws and usurped the poor, innocent and ignorant tribals of their lands; they waited for 20 years after independence for the Government to act to implement its own laws, but as the Government always defended the exploiters, the communists went to the aid of the tribals. Strangely enough, those who stand by the law are being

hunted, while those who violate the law are being sheltered.

If violence is taboo, how is it being met in the Telengana agitation? True, the Government killed over fifty innocent people during the six-month-old agitation, but not to defend people subjected to violent attacks by the agitators, but to defend themselves from the stone-throwing mobs, to save their own lives. Otherwise, the utmost licence was given to the agitators to indulge in unprecedented and large-scale violence on the life and property of people. If their targets were people from the Andhra region, it is much worse; police invariably arrive on the scene only after the event, like the fire brigade. Agitators have attempted to derail trains hundreds of times during the last six months by placing boulders on tracks or by wrecking fish-plates, but not a single person was arrested, let alone shot. Shops, eating places, residential houses were set on fire, grape gardens worth lakhs of rupees were cut down, women molested, people beaten up and killed or burnt alive, all in the name of agitation, but not a single person was arrested and tried for these crimes. What a contrast!

### Shot In Forest

The leaders of those who preach violence in Srikakulam were simply picked up from their beds, taken to the forests and shot dead. A story is invariably put out, as they did in the 1948-50 period, that they were killed in an encounter. Right now, according to the city unit of the revolutionaries, two of their leaders were arrested but the arrests were not announced, the obvious intention being to shoot them down in an alleged encounter. State level and inter-State conferences are being held to round up the Naxalite leaders. At the all-

India level, Mr Chavan is trying to inveigle all opposition leaders into acceptance of a ban on the Naxalites. That is the lot of one set of leaders who preach violence.

There is another set of leaders who also preach violence and they are Dr Chenna Reddy, Mr Konda Laxman Bapuji and the like. The same Mr Chavan, who proposes to put down with a firm hand the violence in Sri-kakulam and elsewhere and therefore orders a free hand to the police, flies all the way from Delhi to Hyderabad to talk, negotiate and compromise with another set of leaders of violence and even invites them to launch and dinner! They were given complete freedom to move about freely, advocating rank violence, particularly against Andhra families and they were never touched until recently. In jail they are being given government guests' treatment. According to the Chief Minister, their daily allowance is Rs 15, as against Rs 3-50 per day for the communist leaders detained.

Not long ago, the Marxist Communists conducted an agitation against increase in land levy and on a trumped up charge that they attacked a tahsildar's office, they were all sent to prison and some of them are still languishing in jail. But during the last six months, scores of government offices were set on fire by the Telen-gana agitators, sometimes right under the eyes of the police authorities. No case is pending in any court against them.

In the so-called communist-infested areas of Srikakulam and elsewhere, insecurity of life and property is felt only by those whose hands are red with the blood of the people, and the Government moved in nearly ten

companies of CRP to provide protection to them. But, in Hyderabad city, the state capital, there is little security of life and property for the fourteen lakh population. A man who goes out of his house is not sure of his return; he may be waylaid, beaten, stoned or killed by the agitators. What happened at Ravindra Sarovar (?) and whether hundreds of women were molested is a subject-matter for enquiry, but right in broad daylight in Hyderabad city, it is the common knowledge of everyone that scores of women were subject to indignities, including undressing almost to the point of nakedness right on the roads (raping apart). Despite the presence of police and army, all this goes on. Innumerable instances are there of the police failing to respond when frantic telephone calls were made seeking help and protection from raiding agitators.

#### Double Standards

Such contrasts in any number of aspects can be given. The lesson is simple: violence has to be put down, but only if it is by communists and not if the perpetrators are Congressmen and their followers. Violence has to be curbed only if it is against the landlords and their like, but not if it is against the common people. Violence cannot be tolerated if it is preached by communists, but it can be winked at if it is by Congressmen. Violence is impermissible if it is against a class which supports the ruling party but is certainly permitted if it, in the process, disrupts the peoples' unity, serves the interests of the ruling class or, to be more specific, the interests of the ruling group inside the ruling party. Government offices and property can be destroyed and yet one can go scot-free if it is in the process of a Congress-led agitation.

Through the 20 years of independence, the Congress rulers have taught, through their practices, that only violence pays. Now the weapon is being used by one group of the Congress against the other. Who said we did not progress?

## Phoney Battle

MR

MR Morarji Desai is hardly the person to be taken seriously, especially on a subject like the dismissal of the West Bengal Ministry. After all, Mr Morarji Desai is on record, some six years ago, about India's readiness to "beat China to pulp", and all the time there are hysterical scare stories about Chinese troop movements on the borders and very little evidence of nerve to face anything. The relationship between the West Bengal and Kerala United Fronts and the Centre is yet a non-antagonistic one, and the Centre has no reason to think of toppling ministries which show signs of acute internal dissensions. The Congress High Command has advised the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee not to attempt any toppling act now because the Centre hopes the United Front Ministry will discredit itself sooner or later.

In any case, rice supply to Kerala is not an issue for the State's confrontation with the Centre. Statistics would establish that during the last six-month period, Kerala got more rice from the Centre than it ever got during any other six-month period. So the complaint that Kerala is being discriminated against in the matter of food is no longer valid. Mr Nambodiripad has no complaint against the Centre and no valid reason for some of his frequent visits to New Delhi and meetings with Mrs Indira Gandhi and Mr Chavan over no one knows what. Even his colleagues in the Politbureau seem mystified about the nature of his talks with the Central leaders.

The slanging match in Kerala is over the Bill to check corruption. A top secret CPI(M) document this correspondent came across shows that the party wants to amend the draft Bill in a sweeping manner. Under the proposed amendments the Chief Minister will be the virtual Lok Pal who would decide whether there is a prima facie case against a Ministerial colleague or not and the issue would not go for enquiry automatically

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as is proposed in the original Bill. The CPI is making an issue out of it, along with some other parties. On the face of it the United Front may seem doomed to break up but it would survive the crisis, for several reasons.

The real issue is the CPI(M)'s power and the CPI's jealousy at the strength of the rival party. Mr Dange might still contend that a country cannot have more than one communist party. Mr Namboodiripad might think that the CPI's three-month ultimatum is enough ground to throw the party out of the United Front because he has secured the Muslim League's support by yielding to its demand for a Muslim majority district. But objectively, there is no basis for a showdown between the two communist parties.

The Soviet attitude is clear. The emphasis is on unity at all costs. Mr Ranadive and Mr Surjeet might not have succeeded in attending the Moscow summit as observers despite the Rumanian party's intervention.

But they might attend the jamboree known as the world anti-imperialist conference when it is held. The CPI(M)'s quest for legitimacy in the Moscow-oriented international communist movement would compel it to go soft on the CPI at home.

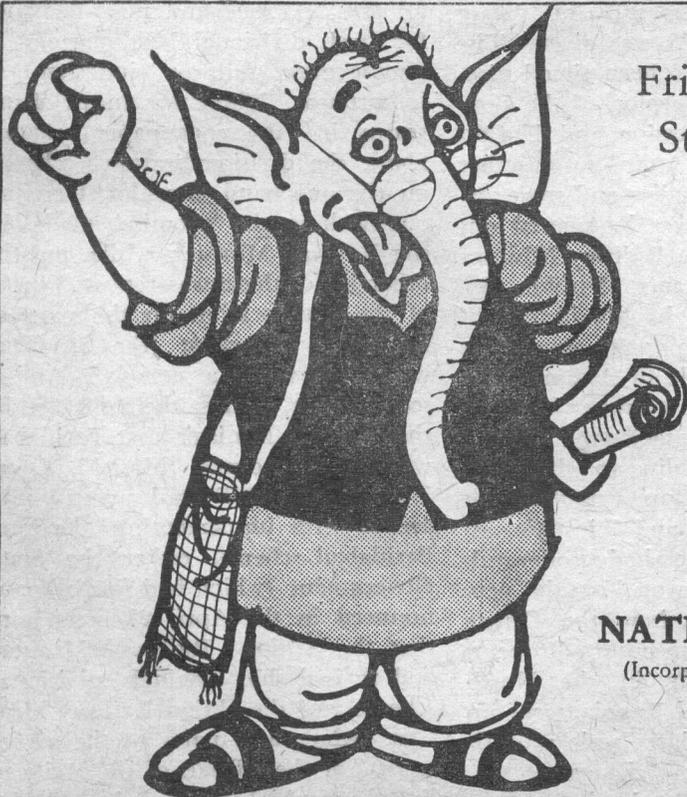
There are reasons to believe that the CPI(M) would climb down on its plans to whittle the Bill down just as the CPI would compromise to a degree on the three-month ultimatum.

What should not be missed in this situation is the convergence of interests of the two parties. On the eve of the mid-term elections, the CPI leaders thought that the CPI(M) was out to ditch them in Kerala the moment the West Bengal elections were over. The need to carry the CPI with it in West Bengal restrained the CPI(M) in Kerala. But after the mid-term elections, the return of the CPI(M) in massive strength in West Bengal weighed with Moscow and the result was a directive to all its mass media men (the radio and Press cor-

respondents) to refer to the CPI(M) as a parallel party and thereby to serve notice on the CPI that the Soviet party might be obliged to recognise the CPI(M) as one of the two parallel parties in the country. Nothing worries the CPSU more than the emergence of the extremist trend in the Indian communist movement. This and its anxiety to ensure the stability of Mrs Indira Gandhi's regime have compelled a softer line towards the CPI(M).

#### Funds

Yet the subjective factors remain. The CPI has been put into a lot of funds by some mysterious sources and the Government of India knows all about it, including the modus operandi of these huge money transfers. Both the parties might believe in nationalisation of India's export-import trade. But the Soviet bloc of countries do not. Look at the official figures and you would find that hardly six or seven percent of Soviet trade



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with India is through the State Trading Corporation or the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation which are the public sector undertakings handling trade. The bulk of the Soviet (and socialist bloc) trade with India is through private export-import houses, some of which have the unofficial recognition of the CPI. The Government knows about the cuts some of these export-import houses have been giving to recognised individuals for the cause of the Indian revolution. A major irritant in the CPI-CPI(M) relations in Kerala is the benefits accruing from the cashewnut export trade with the Soviet Union. When cashew prices are taking a nose dive all over the world, the Soviet Union continues to buy it from Indian exporters at anything from 10 to 15 per cent above the international prices. The Soviet solicitude for some of the cashewnut exporters is baffling and only the CPI in Kerala can give a credible explanation, if it chooses to. The Government of India has a line on the transactions but would rather like them to continue, not out of an anxiety to keep up export earnings but for political reasons.

Another significant development is the end of the Soviet and East European embargo on exporters who had hitherto dissociated themselves from the CPI and were closer to the CPI (M). Very soon an exporter need not suffer any discrimination merely because he is closer to the CPI(M).

All we have to wait for now is the Rumanian intervention to bring the two communist parties together at the top and the minor contradictions at the lower level can be sorted out without difficulty. The only East European country friendly and hospitable to the CPI(M) is incidentally the first communist country the United States President has chosen to visit. That sums up the convergence of various interests. The Centre, it seems, will now be spared all those confrontations with West Bengal and Kerala, real and imaginary, and it need not fear the instability in Kerala because the two communist parties can reach understanding in the cause of greater things.

July 13, 1969

*Assam*

## The Story Of A Division

MSP

IT would be good to begin with a bit of chronology. Some months ago, the Railway Board decided to reorganize the NF Railway under 'divisions' (as different from 'districts', which has been the system till now); the new divisions were proposed to be located at Katihar, Alipurduar and Lumding. There was opposition to the scheme, partly because it would entail some transfers of low-paid staff to far-off places, but mainly because it is felt that the NF Railway is meant essentially for the Assam region, and the divisions to be created should be mainly there. The new divisional scheme was to have gone into effect on May 1. To resist it, an all-party organization called Railway Divisional Scheme Birodhi Karma Parishad (RDSBKP) was formed, and a call for Assam Bandh on April 28 was given. The call seemed to have been timed nicely; the Faridabad session of the Congress party was in session, and the Congress leaders from Assam got together with the central leaders and some sort of an agreement was hammered out between the Union Railway Minister and the Assam Finance Minister. So, on the day of the bandh, instead of the bandh, there was good news given to the people of Assam. The local paper carried a banner headline announcing the agreements reached at Faridabad, according to which, the divisions to be set up would be at Rangia, Lumding, and Tinsukia, all within Assam. Everybody congratulated everybody else on how the people had stood firm, how the Centre was made to see sense etc. Property values, particularly in the North Bank region around Rangia, went up in anticipation of large-scale acquisition of land by the Railways.

The euphoria lasted almost two weeks. It was on May 11 that the first indications that all was not well

appeared, with the publication in the *Assam Tribune* of a news-item about some opposition parties asking for specific clarifications from the NF Railway authorities about the divisionalization scheme. What had happened in the meanwhile was that the NF Railway authorities had assumed from press reports that there was a change of policy and had been waiting for fresh instructions; and if one is to believe local talk, they were pulled up by the higher-ups in the Railway Board for 'going by press reports' and were asked to implement forthwith the pre-Faridabad scheme, and so orders went out, despite banner headlines in the local paper about Centre hoodwinking the people of Assam, despite increasingly irrelevant speculation about new schemes for the NF zone and new demands for fresh divisional headquarters in almost every railway junction of importance. There was an air of unreality in the newspaper reports about the divisionalization scheme; on the one hand, the almost credulous faith in the 'promise' made by the Railway Minister, while on the other hand, there was repeated proof of the equivocation on the part of the same authority; the headlines were almost like a see-saw. And it seemed that, if after the assurance by the Railway Minister that Faridabad would be honoured (May 15, *Assam Tribune*) the NF Railway still proceeded with implementing the pre-Faridabad scheme, either the State Government (which had formally announced in the April 27 press note that the Union Railway Minister had revised the original divisional scheme), or the Union Railway Minister (who was a party to the agreement), or the officials of the Railway Board would have to resign. The 'contradictions' among them were becoming increasingly irreconcilable.

JULY 19, 1969

One could also discern contradictions within these three parties—and here, rumour and gossip must take the place of facts. For instance, it was openly said that one Minister in the Assam Cabinet—the one who negotiated the 'agreement' at Faridabad—was not over-anxious about the location of the various divisions, and that the Railway Minister felt that the sop of a promise was sufficient to make the people happy, without really doing anything about it. Then, there were reports about contradictions within the Railway Ministry, between the boss and his deputies, and those who have been following the statements made about Westinghouse Saxby Farmer of Bengal would not find it hard to believe such reports. Further contradictions were also reported in the higher echelons of the Railway Board, and amidst all these individual and collective contradictions, the main confusion remained unresolved.

#### Off and On

Through the later part of May and during June, contradictory statements followed almost daily, from Gauhati, Shillong and New Delhi. The RDSBKP gave an ultimatum, put off the threatened agitation following a promise of effective intervention by Mr Chaliha, who had other troubles, personal and organizational, to occupy him. Things seemed to be heading towards a climax, particularly after the contents of a letter addressed by the Secretary, Railway Board, to the Government of Assam were reported in the press on June 14; the letter said that there was no prospect of Rangia being made a divisional headquarters; Rangia real estates took a tumble. On the 20th, the APCC Chief was reported to have received an assurance from the Railway Minister that Rangia was on, and the market was bullish. The next day's headline was discouraging; a couple of days later, en-

couraging, and so on and so on. Such casualness and uncertainty would not be believed but for the fact that they are all there in the daily newspaper. But if the authorities perhaps showed their sense of humour in playing hide-and-seek, the people were not amused, and on July 1 a quiet day of protest was observed, with meetings. A week later, on the 7th, there was squatting before the NF Railway headquarters, which was quiet, but tense. And nobody can say what will happen on the 18th, on which day, a total bandh all over the State is planned.

On the face of it, the sequence of events narrated would more properly belong to the realm of fiction. Perhaps it is another sign of the times. It is difficult to convey the sense of exasperation felt by every class of people here over the extremely cheap kind of skulduggery being practised upon them by the Centre. It is like my milkvender's not having

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sufficient milk today, and adding a bit of water; supply the milk today, for tomorrow is another day. The GOI seems to be acting in a similar fashion in its relation with the States, and what is amusing to note is that it is a Congress-run State that is caught with its pants down. In fact, all the three 'parties' caught against one another belong to the same breed. It has been a very satisfactory experience to watch the postures of the Railway Minister, his bureaucratic overlords in the Railway Board, and the Congress Ministers in Assam, each making statements against the other, day after day, over the past two months.

The agitation for the establishment of a division at Rangia, Lumding and Tinsukia (more particularly at Rangia), has different kinds of motivations, mainly economic, some less reputable. But talk on the part of the RDSBKP that the creation of a division at Rangia would ease the unemployment situation in Assam is less than honest; at the most conservative estimate, there are over 7 lakh unemployed in the State, and Rangia would not even touch the problem. Also, administratively, it is very doubtful if divisionalization would in any way be an improvement on the older system of having zonal districts, particularly in a railway like the NF, which is not exactly over-worked. Of course, some top chaps would be promoted, but the lower ranks would be where they were, only uprooted. But so much passion has been generated over the prevarications of the Railway Board and the Railway Ministry that nothing short of a total acceptance of the Faridabad agreement would cool the situation.

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## Federal Finance

GOPAL TRIBEDY

THE appointment of the Fifth Finance Commission and the emergence in several States of non-Congress governments (particularly of Marxist-dominated ones in Kerala and West Bengal) have led to greater public interest in the problems of federal finance. Almost all the States demand more money from the Centre; when devolution of larger financial resources from the Centre is the point, they without exception say that their power to raise taxes is inadequate in relation to their constitutional obligations. But they advance contradictory arguments about the basis of distribution of the divisible pool among themselves.

One of the arguments is that the tax bases reserved for the Union Government by the Constitution are more elastic and more revenue-yielding than those left over for the State governments. The accompanying table, however, presents a dismal picture of the tax efforts of the State

governments in comparison with the Union Government. It shows, in the first place, that the tax revenue collected by the latter increased from Rs 406.52 crores to Rs 2306.50 crores between 1950-51 and 1966-67, while that by all the State governments taken together increased from Rs 227.70 crores in 1951-52 to Rs 937.24 crores in 1966-67. If the period from 1960-61 to 1966-67 is taken the States taxes would show an advance of less than 50 per cent as against a more than 150 per cent increase in Central taxes. Secondly, the table shows that the proportion of Central taxes to the total tax revenue of all the governments increased from 58.5 per cent in 1960-61 to 71.1 per cent in 1966-67, while the proportion of States' taxes declined from 41.5 per cent to 28.9 per cent during the same period. In other words, the Union Government somehow made proportionately greater tax efforts than all the State governments taken together.

Table showing the Tax Revenue and Grants of the Union and State governments.

	(In Crores of Rupees)			
	1950-51	1955-56	1960-61	1966-67
1. Revenue from Central Taxes	406.52	485.06	909.31	2306.50
2. Revenue from States' Taxes	227.70*	282.43	642.41	937.24
3. Total Tax Revenue		767.49	1551.72	3243.74
4. 1 as a percentage of 3		63.20	58.50	71.10
5. 2 as a percentage of 3		36.80	41.50	28.90
6. States' share in Central Taxes	47.52	73.59	179.17	385.04
7. 6 as a percentage of 1	11.80	15.20	19.70	16.70
8. Central grants to States	15.59	35.87	48.55	399.17

\*This figure is for 1951-52

(Compiled from the Report on 1967-68, published by the Reserve

Currency and Finance for the year Bank of India)

The question is whether the States' taxes are really as much inelastic as their tax performance reveals. Roughly speaking, the Constitution has given the States exclusive powers to tax agricultural income and wealth while it has given the Centre much greater powers of taxation of non-agricultural income and wealth. While

the Centre is not permitted to enter the field of agricultural taxation, the States are not allowed to use urban income, foreign trade and industrial production as their tax basis, but they can use commodity taxes in the form of Sales Tax. In an expanding industrial economy the Central taxes are expected to yield a larger revenue than

the States' taxes and the gap between the two is likely to increase if the agricultural sector is either stagnant or moves slowly.

In spite of these facts, the tax revenues of the State governments have ample scope of expansion, provided they have the necessary political courage. They can explore agricultural income tax, land revenue and taxes on agricultural wealth and implements more intensively and more rationally, not only to earn more revenue but also to reach the rich peasants and big landholders who are mostly the recipients of the benefits from the Government-sponsored programmes of agricultural development. It should be pointed out that the revenue from Agricultural Income Tax increased from Rs 9.49 crores in 1960-61 to Rs 10.54 crores in 1966-67 as against the revenue from the Central Income Tax rising from Rs 167.38 crores to Rs 308.68 crores during the same period, though the share of agriculture in total national income is still not much below 50 per cent. This is not solely due to the lower rate of growth of income and lower per capita income in the agricultural sector than in the non-agricultural sector. The fact is that the tax has not been raised to an important status in the tax structure of the States. Many States do not impose the tax; only nine States have so far done so. Even where it exists, the exemption limits are higher and the rates are lower than those of the Central Income Tax. No State has introduced taxes on agricultural wealth and the recent proposal for bringing some agricultural wealth under the purview of the Central Wealth Tax has not been politically acceptable even to some of the Marxist parties participating in some of the non-Congress governments in the States. Land Revenue, one of the major sources of State revenue, has remained all along regressive in character; neither has progression been introduced on the basis of the size of landholding nor any differentiation made on land held as fisheries, forestries, gardens and homestead land. Progression would have compelled the bigger landholders

to surrender a greater portion of their income from land and a higher differential tax rate on un-cultivated land would have inflicted stricter fiscal treatment for evasion of the ceiling on landholding.

#### Soft to the Kulaks

The State governments have so far demonstrated an utter lack of courage in going against the richer section of the rural population. So even though they have some genuine claims on the devolution of larger Central finance, they should first of all prove that they have really exhausted all of their tax resources and reached the inelastic range in which they are incapable of discharging their obligations to the people with their limited tax powers. In the absence of such serious tax efforts on the part of the non-Congress State governments, their call for a movement against the Centre in financial matters may seem a diversionary tactic.

The economic reasons for inflicting a greater tax burden on the richer peasants are even stronger than the political. Industrial capital formation in an under-developed country primarily depends on the extraction of economic surplus from the agricultural sector and its investment in industries. In Japan land tax accounted for 86 per cent of the total revenue in 1875-76 and 45 per cent in 1893-94; in 1906-07 revenue from land tax amounted to 57 per cent of the total capital investment in that year. In the Soviet Union elimination of the kulaks as an exploiting class from the rural economy and collection of grains from collective farms contributed a great deal to capital formation. In China today more than 50 per cent of the total tax revenue comes from agriculture. Even in Burma, Uganda and Ghana the agricultural sector has financed much of the economic development. In India the surplus of the agricultural sector is extracted and absorbed mostly by the so-called rural elite and it is well within the tax powers of the State governments to reach them. Whether the efforts would be effective or not is a different point; but sin-

cerity of policies of the Marxist parties may now be tested as they are in power in some of the States.

The second point relates to the financial autonomy of the States, their share in Central taxes and the nature of the Union grants to them. Elementary principles of federal finance justify reservation of the taxes on industrial income, production and wealth for the Central Government and so without violating the economic principles no new tax power, it seems, can be given to the State governments. The need for giving the States a share of the Central taxes is, therefore, inevitable. In this connection, there arises the problem of financial autonomy of the States, which will become politically more significant as different political parties, with diametrically opposite policies, come into power at the Centre and in several States. If it is not made statutorily obligatory for the Central Government to give a part of its revenue to the States, the party in power at the Centre may use the grant of finance as a political weapon against the parties in power in the States. Moreover, the people of the States expressing a vote of non-confidence in the party ruling at the Centre may be deprived of their legitimate claims over the revenues collected from them. Thus to safeguard the financial autonomy of the States and enable them to spend according to the wishes of their people, the Central money should mostly come through the tax-sharing programmes.

#### Discretionary

In this respect, the table, referred to above, shows that the States' share in Central taxes declined from 19.7 per cent in 1960-61 to 16.7 per cent in 1966-67. It further reveals that the quantum of Central grants to the States increased from less than one-third to more than the absolute size of the tax share. The grants again are of two types: one coming under Article 275 of the Constitution for which the Finance Commission makes recommendations and the other coming under article 282 which is made available to the States accord-

ing to the decision of the Central executive, as advised by the Planning Commission which itself may be regarded as the advisory board of the Union Ministry. The former is at present in 1 : 2 proportion to the latter. So the tendency is towards a progressive decline in the statutory financial obligation of the Centre to the States and a corresponding increase in its discretionary grants. Furthermore, the Central Government took, in the past, unilateral decisions to abolish the tax on railway passenger fares and to exclude corporate incomes from income tax. As a result the States are deprived of their share in the rising revenue from the increase in railway fares which replaces the tax (for which the States are given a fixed annual grant) and of their legitimate claims on the revenue from Corporate Tax. In the context of the new political situation neither the unilateral decisions nor the discretionary grants are likely to be tolerated by the States and thus financial relations between the Centre and the States must be strictly guided by a body of the judicial status, if the impending conflict is to be avoided.

Even then the problem of devising an acceptable criterion for the determination of the levels of expenditures of the Central and State governments remains unresolved. It may not be possible for the combined expenditure level to be borne by the combined tax resources, because the States may develop a propensity to increase their financial commitments out of their desire not to displease the taxpayers. Again, though it is the peo-

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ple of the States who benefit from the Central expenditures, the allocations and, therefore, the level itself may not be according to the policies of some of the States. For example, West Bengal may ask for more Central money as its own resources are insufficient to increase the salary of the primary school teachers but its policy is to do so, while the Centre is unable to make any more money available to it as it incurs a huge defence expenditure. West Bengal may not like the defence expenditure in comparison with the expenditure on primary education. All these raise the wider issue of the working of a federation in a multi-party system in which different parties have different regions of influence.

The third point refers to the basis of distribution of the divisible pool among the States simultaneously. On the one hand, the relatively richer States emphasise collection as the basis of distribution, while the more populous States claim that the size of population should be the basis; on the other hand, the States sparsely populated and poorer but larger in size, put forward the geographical area as the basis, while others, having no scope of benefiting from any of the bases referred to above, point out the degree of underdevelopment and relative needs as the proper basis. Even when a single political party happened to rule in all the States such conflicting bases were advocated by the respective States in their memoranda to the previous Finance Commissions. So when different political parties, some of which having even a regional basis, rule in different States, any compromise solution prescribed by the Finance Commission is bound to cause disappointment to some States.

West Bengal's argument, in its memorandum to the Fifth Finance Commission that "in a federal Constitution allocations of resources among States should correspond to allocation of functions" omits the fact that the criteria for allocations of the two things are completely different.

## Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

IT may be too early to say so but it does appear that the fetid atmosphere in Corporation House has at least had some whiffs of fresh air injected into it. What will be the ultimate end is, of course, anybody's guess; the mess left by the much-vaunted decades old Congress rule can only be cleared by nothing short of a bulldozer which is a good machine for levelling garbage but hardly suitable or humane for the human variety infesting the corridors of Calcutta Corporation and its many offices all over the city.

The sins of the old Fathers will continue to be visited upon the new ones for a pretty long time—as the raid of bailiffs of a decorating company on the Corporation last week showed. Businessmen can be quite hard-hearted when it is a question of cash and also take readily to the direct method. Or maybe there was some other inspiration. The Congress administration of Calcutta Corporation was not noted for handing out contracts except to its own henchmen. As such it is only to be expected that some of them at least might not be completely ungrateful and would be willing to carry out a little job like attaching the tables and chairs of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor particularly when they are no longer members of the Congress. The sum involved was only Rs. 8,000. Ironically, it was spent on building welcome arches for the late Prime Minister of India on his visit to Calcutta. This of course is only one of the numerous spendthrift acts of the past administration on things not even remotely connected with Corporation affairs. Luckily, the chairs and tables could be saved this time by promptly paying up. But there are lessons to be learnt from this which no doubt Mr Prasanta Sur will not ignore.

It may be just wishful thinking, but the sluggish machinery of the Corporation seems to be bestirring

itself into unwonted action. Here and there we see signs that some action at least is taking place. Roads are being dug up to make new man-holes, new drain connections and for such things. The slime is also being cleaned out and what is more surprising it is being removed and not left just to be washed back into the drain by the rains. Whether this improvement is going to be maintained or will just fizzle out is an open question. Corruption and inefficiency is a way of life in the Corporation. It is not likely that these elements who have had things entirely their own way all these years will give in without a fight.

For making a clean break with the past a good example, of course, is necessary at the top. So long as the Councillors themselves spent most of their time on things not even remotely connected with civic affairs honest people felt frustrated while the corrupt had a field day. It is, therefore, a pleasure to find that the attempt by the Congress to raise the issue of the attack on newspapers was thrown out completely as being not connected in any way with civic affairs. If this spirit is maintained irrespective of political issues involved, we shall be spared the pain of hearing the Mayor say that there is no money for sinking tubewells.

\* \*

After Mr Jyoti Basu's plain speaking to the delegation of the West Bengal Police Association, sense has prevailed on them and the proposed agitation has been withdrawn. But the purpose of those instigating the move has already been served. Some units are reported to have dissociated themselves from the move while individually many will no doubt keep aloof. But an open confrontation between at least a section of the police and the Government has been brought about, putting the Home Minister on the horns of a dilemma. Should the situation worsen at a later date he may ultimately have to take help from the Centre by asking for the military. On the other hand, while their legitimate grievances will certainly be looked into, acceptance of

their central demand, to wit, withdrawal of the suspension order on their Secretary, Mr Subodh Dutta, of Durgapur ill-fame, is unthinkable for the United Front Government in general and the Home Minister in particular. The issue admits of no easy solution. Those in the Front who grudged Mr Jyoti Basu and the CPI(M) the Home (Police) portfolio should thank their stars that they are not in his shoes and have him there to pull their chestnuts out of the fire.

Mr Basu has said that Congressmen were behind the move of the Police Association and we can well believe it. But it would be a mistake to think that without a basis of genuine grievances anyone could lead them anywhere. Unfortunately, over the years the police have become a class in themselves, cut off from the mainstream of life. The situation is something like that prevailing before independence. Nor is it easy to see what could have been done to change things, the nature of the service being what it is; but certainly the left movement has neglected them. Leaving out the armed sections, there is no reason why contact could not be established with the others. This lack of contact is now recoiling on the United Front. Added to this is genuine confusion caused by the pressures and counterpressures among the partners of the Front. Apart from everything else the role of the police has to be spelt out in more specific terms than that they should be with the people. But it is easier said than done.

The Home Minister has proposed the recruitment of Home Guards as an alternative to the threat of the policemen against the Government. In principle this is all right. But with the present state of the United Front this may lead to more problems than it would solve. It is extremely doubtful if the other partners will look with anything but suspicion on recruitment on a large scale of Home Guards and passing on to them the duties of policemen.

The demonstrating NVF men reportedly went into police vans in front of the Assembly House shouting 'United Front Zindabad' and even though they are under the control of the police, there is no reason to suspect any other motive. Expectations have been roused amongst all sections of the people, and these unfortunates who do all sorts of dirty jobs are no exception. However, the NVF system is to have a continual turnover of men and hence no permanent jobs are possible. The Chief Minister sometime back gave figures explaining how many thousands had been given the training offered by the NVF. But the question is: to what purpose? If there is no fixed job at the end of the training, it may be worse than no training at all. Perhaps someone will take a look at the whole system of training young people in various fields. A thorough change seems indicated.

All over the country training schemes proliferate like mushrooms and young men and women too join up hopefully and spend a lot of time and energy to finish the courses. Their hopes, however, crash very soon. At the end of their course they are given certificates which are mere scraps of paper, as they find out after months of fruitless search to put their training into some use. Ultimately, if they are lucky they drift into some job which has no connection with the subject for which the Government has spent a lot of money and they their energies. Only a very few get the jobs for which they are trained. As it is the Government is only providing at public expense a large labour force for industry with training for them to pick and choose from. Any Government which professes to believe in socialism would at least force industry to pay for the cost of training their men. For all the good it does, it might be better to scrap all such schemes and parcel out the savings in doles to the maximum number of persons possible. Such is the poverty of our country that all these training schemes are looked upon less as the door to opportunity which

everyone knows comes only for the fortunate few but more as a means of earning the few rupees paid out as an allowance.

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Even as the 'Big Five' of the United Front settled on their 8-point plan to end disputes within the Front news has been coming of fresh clashes. While a realistic approach has been made in analysing the situation on most points, the fact remains that different partners are pulling in different ways. Moreover, one fact has been completely ignored. As a remedial measure it has been suggested that fights against the vested interests should be intensified. However, it should be obvious that unless general demonstrations are meant in which all can join, no problems are going to be solved this way. In fact, practically all the clashes have occurred in the course of actual fights against vested interests whether in the urban or industrial areas.

The concept of the United Front is still very much limited to the State level and the Assembly or bandhs and hartals. When it comes to specific local issues, it is each party for itself. Coupled to that is the refusal of the smaller parties to face realities and accept the fact that whether they like it or not the CPI(M) presently happens to be the major partner of the Front.

The recent civic elections at Nabadwip should serve as a lesson. The United Front partners failed to agree to contest jointly. As a result the CPI(M), the Congress and a United Front composed of the CPI, Bangla Congress, RSP and SSP contested the 20 seats. Out of this the CPI(M) won outright 13 seats, while the United Front got only 1 against 5 of the Congress.

Nabadwip certainly is not the whole of West Bengal. But it is both a symptom of the disease and a pointer to the ultimate remedy, however drastic it might be. If the parties cannot come together even for the limited purpose of fighting municipal elections how can they unite

on other issues where they are more intimately involved? As for Big Brotherly attitude, it is a fact of life which the younger brothers in the United Front joint family would do

well to recognize for their own good. They should ponder the lessons of Nabadwip where they fought the elections without the protection of the Big Brother.

## Bishnu Rabha

ARUN KUMAR CHAKMA

GOVERNMENT offices and private institutions in Assam were declared closed when Bishnu Rabha died last month. Condolence meetings were held at which Ministers and custodians of art and culture recalled, with melancholy benevolence, his great contribution to 'Assamese culture'. The paradox of the situation was that they were the ones who had always kept themselves miles away from Bishnu Rabha during his lifetime because of the way he seized every opportunity to hit hard at the philistines with his keen sense of sarcasm and, above all, because he had always refused to be ruled by the magic wand of bourgeois respectability.

In our boyhood days we used to hear about Bishnu Rabha, his name often being associated with IPTA celebrities most of whom are today no better than glib degenerates. The first time we saw him was during the sulphurous days of 1950 when famine had engulfed the whole of East Pakistan along with communal riots.

Thousands of men, women and children died of starvation and we, then Class VI students in a village high school, were taught to take it all as the outcome of God's wrath. It was at this time that Bishnu Rabha appeared before us like a stormy petrel. His brilliant exposition, through songs, dance recitals and dramatic performance, of what had unleashed this scourge on millions of people, left a lasting impression among the villagers who kept standing in the open for hours together braving torrential rains. From then on Bishnu Rabha was able to stir the villagers with his efforts to open

their eyes to a reality they had never known before.

Bishnu Rabha was a folk artist. He belonged to a tribal community of Assam which is steeped in primordial poverty. He had never forgotten during the four decades of his eventful career how he and people like him were conditioned by their background: tramped under foot, shaken, deafened, the inside of their mouths inspected by men chanting 'holy teeth, holy gums'. What he used to talk about and do made many shrink and many others who came to patronize him found it hard to swallow. The so-called literati came out openly against him. His fault was that he wanted to give his works a real stamp of social significance in revolt against the demands of the ruling aesthetes who wanted to suppress the social distinctions.

Like many others of his time he was also in the vortex of the independence movement when he was a student of Ripon college in Calcutta. He was found guilty of leading many student demonstrations and rusticated. It was about this time that he came in contact with a number of prominent Marxists and became an ardent follower of Marx. Back in Assam he moved from village to village with his little cultural troupe, organised with great difficulty and equipped with primitive resources. In the process he did not only devote himself to training people in the task of changing reality but also explored new vistas of folk art, bringing people almost to the level of a cultural regeneration. But, ironically enough, after independence he found himself a lone man and had to bear the

whole burden. While his comrades got busy minting money through exotic show-biz events, Bishnu Rabha, then at the peak of brilliance, rotted in extreme poverty, still faithfully pursuing his beliefs.

We no doubt lost a great revolutionary when Bishnu Rabha began his parliamentary career some years back, a career marked with cynicism and indeterminate politics. In the years following independence he was a frustrated man because all that he stood for was largely ignored while

irate people panicked over their own human condition. As he was desperately looking for a way out, patronizing perversity on the part of others dragged him on to the floor of the Assembly House. Strictly speaking, as a parliamentarian he was a failure in that he could not infuse the same amount of revolutionary fervour in politics as he had always been able to do as an artist. However, he did not have to drag on for long; he died well before the corrupt environ could overwhelm him.

ment: the murder of a headmaster at Ethora and the military train robbery. This time also the target was the CPI(M). While the party was directly involved in Ethora, for the train robbery also the Home Minister and obliquely the CPI(M) were blamed. In fact the CPI(M) from its own angle should be happy that the big bourgeoisie has chosen it as the principal target of attack.

Coverage of the military train robbery in some papers, particularly in Delhi and Bombay, was strange. News of the incident first reached Calcutta a little after three in the afternoon. The information was given by the Eastern Railway's Publicity Department. It was rather scrappy, for which the Railways were not to blame. By about nine in the evening more details came and it was quite clear that the incident wasn't as big as some people had thought it to be.

But the outstation papers had a grim story the next day. Masked Gunmen Loot Train, they screamed. While the Calcutta papers mentioned specifically that no rifles had been stolen, these said ammunition of an unspecified nature had been taken away. The impression these stories gave was that something terrible had happened, that armed men were roaming about the countryside in Bengal. The story had been circulated by a news agency which presumably made the additions to make it saucy. And the desk people of leading papers grabbed at it, in some cases even rejecting their own correspondents' reports. Indeed some papers certainly enjoy freedom. What was not questioned in any paper was why the Railway Protection Force unit at Baktiarnagar Gate was withdrawn only a few days back.

Even some of the Calcutta papers carried editorials which were rather different in tone from the report of the incident. While in the report all papers carried the Government's stand that the dacoity was not politically motivated, the editorials kept the issue open. The *Hindusthan Standard*, for example, insists that the

## The Press

# Paper Attack

READER

WHAT happened in front of two leading dailies last week may well be taken as a pointer to the shape of things to come. Not that more cars would be damaged or a greater number of pressmen would be assaulted. The Press is likely to suffer more with people's suspicion about the written word deepening in the future. For suspicion is sure to mount in a situation where the Press tends to get further away from the hopes and aspirations of the ordinary reader.

Tuesday's was not the first attack on the Press. In recent past individual journalists have been beaten up, sometimes severely, mostly during demonstrations by political parties. But Tuesday was rather different in that the major UF constituents had decided to organize a peaceful campaign against the activities of the Press. Instead of choosing individuals the Press was viewed in its totality as an enemy of the people. But the immature boys who broke away from the main procession to break vans and window panes did not know how strong the myth of freedom of the press still is, and that there are other ways of fighting it.

There was over-reaction to the incident. On Tuesday itself four

Ministers went to the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* office and on Wednesday a CPI leader wanted the UF to discuss it immediately. No such concern was evident in 1962 or even in April this year.

The sudden break in the UF ranks after the incident which caused the CPI(M) to stand isolated helped the newspapers to mount their campaign against that party. The next day the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and the *Hindusthan Standard* came out with headlines such as: We Have Been Attacked. The statements of those who had dissociated themselves were published boldly together with a front page editorial in the Bengali daily asking, "Where Are We?" The whole paper bore evidence of an air of challenge. But perhaps underneath lay fear. The attack made all-India news. The *Hindustan Times* had it as its lead; it was the second lead in the *Times of India*. The *Hindu* carried an editorial on the subject. All these papers who have declared a *jihad* against the UF Government saw in Tuesday's incident another evidence of the "crumbling law and order situation".

Two other incidents also came in handy in last week's "paper" attack against the United Front Govern-

## Pathik's 'Ma'

BY OUR DRAMA CRITIC

dacoits had made away with ammunition and arms and says that since it is reasonable to presume that the dacoits knew what the train carried, the crime becomes much more sinister than an ordinary case of brigandage. The stand that it was nothing more than ordinary wagon-breaking is, according to the paper, mere popular belief and it wonders at the anxiety to prejudice issues.

It does seem that the newspapers have ceased to be interested in facts. Any bit of information collected anyhow gives them the opportunity to write long sermons on their pet subject: law and order. Thus excepting *The Statesman* no other paper sent any reporter to the spot. They were satisfied with bits and pieces which they could get in Calcutta. In fact the *Hindusthan Standard* together with its Bengali counterpart seemed more interested in letting the people know how long the news took to reach Calcutta than what had actually happened. The hint obviously was that the government machinery was crumbling. Another pet subject with newspapers these days.

GORKI'S Russia was perhaps one of the most repressive regimes in Europe at that time. The working masses had no rights and no entity. They were treated worse than animals and any attempt at creating the simplest of organisations was attacked ruthlessly. Thus the plea for bread became an act of subversion. Naturally, therefore, those who were interested in raising themselves to a human level acted in utter secrecy and their methods became conspiratorial out of necessity.

Revolution is a frightening business. It frightens those who fight for it as much as those who fight against it because it trends to destroy familiar forms while establishing new relationships. And not in the least because of its relentless progression.

The absence of this element of terror in the background was perhaps the most glaring defect in Pathik's *Ma* and maybe it was for this reason that the "mother's" intrepidity failed to establish the dramatic highlight of the play.

Pathik's producer approached his subject romantically, making carefree cavaliers out of resolute revolutionaries. The workers—particularly in the "relief" scene—became comic almost to the extent of farce. The police chief, despite the correctness of his dress, was unable to evoke any terror in the audience because of his own unsure understanding of the part, and was often the cause of many a snigger in the auditorium.

In fact the producer's whole attitude seemed irresponsible and un-studied. It is difficult to forgive someone who makes a Russian worker of those days wear a version of an old boy scout's hat. Nor is it possible to swallow workers looking spruce and clean and beautifully made up.

It was a pity therefore that a drama of such depth and power was reduced to superficialities and the

audience actually prevented from going deeper into the experiences enacted on the stage.

To begin with, audibility was poor because voices were generally weak and on many occasions the audience had to ask for "louder" dialogue. In trying to avoid change of scene the stage sets were so arranged that in most of the "crowded" scenes actors were standing on each other. Particularly marked was the time when Andrei was reading a letter and the listeners had to act out their reactions in the style of the Hindi theatre of the twenties—very dramatic and also very shallow.

The back-drop showing a typical industrial scene through back-projection was effective but the ramp in front of it and the ramp opposite "mother's" hut did not quite fulfil any particular necessity. An open "framework" set to show the movements of actors even outside the main scene could have been used very effectively and by controlled lighting a courtyard effect could have been provided for the workers' meeting which was attacked by the police. As it was acted, it seemed that the meeting was being held on a street corner which showed a complete lack of any need for security measures.

And finally one question: what was the necessity of singing the "Internationale" through the microphone? It is a rousing song and the greater the number of voices that sing the greater the effect. When the Red Flag is held aloft the militant workers should have joined in the singing—maybe then some in the audience would have participated also.

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## Marxist Intellectuals

In "Marxist Intellectuals" (July 5) Sumanta Banerjee writes: "One never expected it (the communist movement) to produce—considering the parasitic cultural background of the modern Indian middle class—an intellectual of the stature of Gramsci." But we should remember that though the intellectuals in Italy also—according to Gramsci himself—are 'world citizens', above nationalism and unpopular, i.e. in a sense rootless, out of them came an intellectual like Gramsci. So a parasitic cultural background alone does not explain the phenomenon of the abjection of Indian "intellectuals". Moreover, half-a-century is always not a very short period—the communist party of Italy as well as of China was founded in the 1920s. The real problem is that in Bengal as well as India Marxists are seldom intellectuals: they are, in most cases, intellect hucksters and at best intellect workers, as Paul Baran says, and are deeply involved in the present system.

Secondly, it is hard to agree that the intelligentsia differs from the working class in that it talks more than it acts. Here again I refer to Gramsci who says that all men are intellectuals but the activities of all men are not those of intellectuals. Indeed a Marxist cannot believe in the dichotomy of talking and action or manual labour and intellectual labour. Intelligence or intellectual capabilities are necessary in every activity—everybody does some intellectual activity outside his own sphere, everybody has his conception of the world and takes part in the transformation of ideas. A Marxist intellectual always tries to assimilate theory and practice and must be committed in his personal as well as collective life to changing the world. The tragedy of our communist movement is that it has not yet created

its organic intellectuals who can stand against the traditional intellectuals.

ARJUN BANDYOPADHYAY  
Naihati

Sumanta Banerjee in his 'Marxist Intellectuals' hits hard at those who desire to go or have already gone or will be going in the near future to the USA. This is a peculiar, if not childish, argument. If one remains a Marxist here, there is absolutely no reason why one should become non-Marxist or anti-Marxist if one goes to the United States. Perhaps Mr Banerjee does not know that the best works on Marxism are still coming from the US and if we consider Marxism to be still alive the free debate necessary for its survival is only possible in the 'free world' and not in the so-called communist countries where the voice of dissent is treated as treason.

SUBRATA MUKHERJEE  
New Delhi

## Naxalites

Mr Dipak Chaudhury's letter (June 28) is instructive. *Frontier's* source of information may or may not be *Deshabrati*, but what is the source of Mr Choudhury's denial? What proof does he adduce? North Bengal University is given as an instance. Here also he gives himself out. The Naxalites however know that defeat and counter-revolution are inevitably included in the curriculum of Revolution. He admits that it was once a strong base but were we not told that Naxalites had no base whatsoever? *Frontier* may conjure up unions, but what makes the Left CP Politbureau adopt a resolution on such a non-existent phantom as 'Srikakulam'? True, the capitalist press is "publicising" the Naxalites but it does so in order to distort their image and show them merely as anarchists, dacoits, anti-social elements, to the delight of the Left CP and the reactionaries.

In their time Marx and Lenin were only two men with a dozen or

so adherents. Yet they haunted Europe. Lenin's Bolsheviks were once an insignificant force, nine-tenth of the working class leaders in Europe joined the revisionists during the crisis period of the First World War; yet the few were then the motive forces of history. Naxalites are playing a similar role. *Frontier* perhaps sees in the embryo the future. That is what Gorky called 'revolutionary exaggeration of the truth'.

A READER  
Calcutta

According to Mr Dipak Chaudhuri (June 28), Naxalites are steadily losing ground among students and are trying to exploit youths and "Naxalite-jotedar clashes." (Why doesn't the CPI(M) do so?) If Mr Chaudhuri thinks that it is the students who are going to take up the leadership of the Communist Party, I do not think he is right.

As for peasants, I have been touring rural areas and as far as I know the Naxalites are gaining in my State (Bihar). They are moving in *certain* villages here without caring for the entire administration. I should say that no political party is as near the people as the Naxalite groups and the CPI(ML) are.

N. K. SINGH

Every CPI(M) supporter should be grateful to the Naxalites: it is they who have given a fillip to the revolutionary fervour so long lacking in the ranks of the party. But for the Naxalbari movement and its subsequent popularity, though limited, the present aggressiveness in the forcible seizure of khas and benami lands at different places and the resultant death cry of the bourgeoisie would not have been a reality. Secondly, in the absence of Naxalite criticism the CPI(M) could hardly have succeeded in using the bourgeois parliament as a means to gear up its revolutionary activities, and exposing simultaneously the utter futility of the system. Finally, it is the Naxalites who, by creating a hysteria of revolution among the city-bred adolescents, have been

able to draw a large number of militant young men into their fold and it is widely known that some staunch anti-communists of yesterday have swelled their ranks, which is undoubtedly a feat to reckon with. I am sure the day is not far off when all the revolutionaries, whatever the party they swear by, will not fail to find in the CPI(M) the real leadership to bear down all opposition.

Jayanta K. Chaudhuri  
Pirojpur, Englishbazar

### Guru

Oh, *Guru!* It baffles me why Utpal Dutt sacrificed his brilliant artistic career for a film like this. What a tragedy for Mr Dutt and what a loss for the entire revolutionary cultural movement of West Bengal!

A CULTURAL WORKER  
Calcutta

### Romeo And Juliet

Zeffirelli's version of *Romeo and Juliet* is an interpretation from the angle of modern youth—a contemporary reality. To miss this point is a gross injustice to the director, which Mr Roy Chaudhuri (July 5) has done. Otherwise he would have seen there is no "crass realism" in the film and the agony and ecstasy of forbidden love between a teenage pair is very much present. Not unjustifiably, the theatricality of the tragedy has been discarded in favour of visual images, which to me, have become sheer poetry. And, far from indicating the revulsion of the audience, the catcalls from the front rows do prove that the number of philistines in our society is not diminishing.

Abhijit Mukhopadhyay  
Calcutta

### Vietnam

The release of three American prisoners of 'war' on July 4 when they celebrate their declaration of independence from Britain is a coup de maitre by North Vietnam. After

a lapse of two centuries the Americans are perpetrating the same brutalities in Vietnam which their forefathers fought against and won, and the Vietnamese are fighting the Yankees for the same ideals.

The meaning of the Vietnamese gesture may be lost on the U.S. administration but not on the many Nobel laureates, humanists, scientists, writers and brilliant professors who, without underrating the employment potential of the CIA, may still be uncommitted.

However, the present administration does not have to bother about them. Having learnt the language of '1984' as early as 1954, it sees no contradiction between celebrating the 4th of July and continuing marauding raids on Vietnam. It has the ICBM but still U.S. security is threatened by North Vietnam! At this pace of insecurity the U.S. may soon be threatened by Chi Chi islands.

P. BHATTACHARYYA (Mrs)  
Kenduadihi (Bankura)

### Why Did V.C. Leave ?

The unlucky Vice-Chancellor, Dr B. N. Ganguli, has left Delhi University. Some say it was because of ill health and hard work, others say it was because of his differences with the Delhi Administration and V. K. R. V. Rao, the Union Education Minister. Still others (*Hindustan Times*, 29-6-69) attributes his exit to his failure to face bravely the Naxalites. What are the facts? It is true he had differences with the Delhi Administration and the Education Minister on the issues of fresh admissions and governing bodies. This year more than 7,500 admission-seeking students are bound to be disappointed and the issue of governing bodies (these control the colleges, which in turn are controlled by petty bourgeois and bourgeois elements) is again drawing the attention of students. It is also true that the year (1967) in which he became the Vice-Chancellor, the communists became active and since then they have been

a constant headache for him. The Vice-Chancellor has felt, but the basic contradictions are intact and the communists are still there fighting for the genuine rights of the students. The Administration, the Education Minister and their hirelings in the university feel that a man with different and of harder stuff would do the job. Students also welcome the change, for reasons we can easily understand.

RAGU  
Delhi

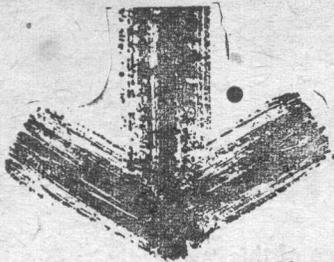
### Obsessions

In your recent issues you seem to be preoccupied with the anatomy and functions of the hind end of the forked animal. Expressions like 'birth and copulation', 'mother's exposed underbelly and all', 'copulating couples' 'actual (sic) copulations', 'women by their hundreds' being raped in Calcutta and finally women 'raped in cartloads',—have appeared in one single article.

'Raping in cartloads' is probably a blend in the cinematographic sense of the ideas resulting from news reported in the press that lorryloads of female undergarments were found and the conclusion therefrom, on inductive grounds, that an identical number of women were raped. It is odd that it did not occur to you that intact Bengali female attire, in situ, and copulation are not mutually exclusive. Sometime back *Time* reported the futility of the custom enjoined on the Japanese girls not to put off their shoes while in the company of men, stating "much can be accomplished with shoes on." Similarly much could be accomplished without shedding a dress. The news item "lorryloads of female dress" itself speaks of defective imagination.

B. Bhattacharyya  
Bankura

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