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THE LIP-SERVICE YEAR

WITHIN a few days the country will embark on a year-long celebration of Gandhi centenary. His self-appointed heirs have drawn up an elaborate programme to be gone through on the occasion with an ostentation that Gandhi would have abhorred. For them no other way of paying their tributes to the Mahatma exists, and there is no doubt that neither money nor strident propaganda will be lacking to proclaim to the world how faithfully they are adhering to Gandhi's ideals. For two decades his name has been invoked by the leaders of the Congress and some other political parties to sell their own fads. His name has become a battle-cry in the political gang-fights in the country. More so within the Congress. Only a few days ago Mrs Indira Gandhi said at the Brigade Parade Ground that the socialism she was trying to introduce was really of the Gandhian variety. Not to be outdone by her, the State Congress president, Dr Pratap Chandra Chunder, blessed of Mr Atuly Ghosh, spoke of the infinite capacity of the Congress for self-perpetuation as it could thrive even after Gandhi had ceased to be a four-anna member of the party. With Mr Ghosh worsted for the time being, not much speculation is necessary as to whom the Gandhi cap fits in West Bengal according to Dr Chunder.

What the leaders conveniently overlook and would like the people to forget is that those with whom Gandhi and what he stood for have become swear-words of a sort had ditched the "Father of the Nation" in his last days. On the day of independence when the whole country was in raptures over what Nehru described in a tremulous voice India's tryst with destiny, he was a desolate man in a Beliaghata bostee striving desperately for communal amity. A few months before that he had told a reporter at Noakhali that he was passing through a fiery ordeal and he treasured highly whatever love and affection came his way during this critical period. He raced through the country in pursuit of this fire to stamp it out, but it ultimately engulfed him in New Delhi. He did not get from his closest associates what he was longing for. The tired old men of the Congress betrayed him ; he suddenly found himself a has-been, a person to be tolerated for his past but ignored for his present nuttiness. He was stubborn enough to persist in preaching what he believed to be the first charge of the Government—communal amity. He appealed

conscientious liberal waits, sticking his neck, with ostrich-like perversity, into the quicksand of liberal hopes and aspirations, and the highminded Marxist waits, in trancelike expectancy, counting the hours, across which looms his visionary world—time, which like tide, waits for none, runs precipitously out. Before it runs wholly and

irretrievably out, the choice has to be made, by these same highminded and conscientious gentlemen—the choice of revolution or enlightened authoritarianism or anarchy. Across this last, however, looms no visionary world, but disaster.

(Concluded)

tation can make it otherwise. If what I call corruption is what you consider generosity of heart, there is little point in stretching the dispute. Where two value systems clash, there cannot be any winners, nor any losers. In their heart of hearts, the bulk of the Germans, even today, perhaps consider that the Nazis were a lark: their only fault was that somehow they muffed the war.

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Have things changed qualitatively with the coming in of the United Front? That, indeed, is the question. If the form of nepotism remains unimpaired, and there is merely an internal substitution of the personnel involved in the process, it would still remain open to doubt whether the elements of progress have in fact resumed control of the historical process. Little purpose will be served by beating about the bush. Cynicism is, if I can repeat a fairly worn-out cliche, as cynicism does. Let me illustrate what I have in mind by referring to what is happening—or not happening—to West Bengal's food policy under the UF regime.

A conference of Chief Ministers has been convened this week-end in New Delhi to thrash out the broad features of the policy for prices and procurement for the Kharif crops. West Bengal's Ministers have been much too busy quarrelling among themselves to discuss even the contours of the policy which they are going to propose at the conference. The United Front, at its meeting last Wednesday, decided to hold over the discussion of food policy; there was the more important matter of inter-party disputes—food can wait. Since they have denied themselves the opportunity of spending some time on what ought to be the features of a socialist food policy, the upshot is predictable: at the very last moment, even as the Chief Minister and the Food Minister are catching the plane for New Delhi, a hurried discussion would take place, and whatever the civil servants would propose, would be gulped down. Last year, the alibi for not taking a close look at the existing food policy was that it would be improper to introduce disturbances in the middle of the procure-

Calcutta Diary

CHARAN GUPTA

TO make a comparative study of the incidence of corruption in different parts of the country is a tricky business; conditions are disparate, and an outsider is at a natural disadvantage at getting at the facts. But the state of West Bengal's roads and public buildings leaves me wondering: could it be that, man to man, the contractors and engineers in this State steal more than elsewhere? Building and construction costs are an easy 25 per cent higher here than in Delhi and Bombay, while wage rates are, if anything, slightly lower. The unit expenditure on current maintenance of public works is, if anything, higher than in every other State, and yet look at the horrid condition in which these are kept. I have heard a lot about the soft subsoil which adds to the difficulties of a proper maintenance of highways and thoroughfares, but, by talking to the contractors here, you would get the impression that the geology and topography of West Bengal constitute a *sui generis*. No, if the roads in Bombay are better maintained, the reason is not just that that city has more money, but also that it has less thieves. Till 1947, the Calcutta Corporation was one of those rare arenas where the Congress hacks could exercise sovereign jurisdiction untrammelled by British nose-poking; rather than using the opportunity to demonstrate a model of civic administration, the party's functionaries exploited the Corporation as the base for experimental nepotism, corruption was nurtured and encouraged true to the *mores* of a

Hindu undivided family. Jobbery and nepotism, after all are relatively recent concept in Hindu society. If a headman from the village comes to occupy a position of vantage, he is expected to take care of the members of his clan: not to care for them would be to go against the very ethos of the culture. It is this specific culture which inspired the working of all the local bodies in Bengal in the period between Surendranath Banerjee and Independence. If the Calcutta Corporation became infested with crooks and rogues, it is because moral erosion was a part of Congress policy, despite the various pretences associated with Mahatma Gandhi and the tribe swearing by him. Following the departure of the British, when the Congress took over Writers Building, running the State's administration became an expanded version of the chaos-leavened-with-corruption which the Corporation is. Dr B. C. Roy, I have been told, used to bail out his friends in distress by buying out their property at fancy prices with State funds: call it, if you like, corruption; but according to Dr Roy's moral lexicon, this, I am sure, was considered a noble gesture. What the Chief Minister practised became the precept for the other ministers, senior civil servants, and underlings. Ethics is a matter of definition, and definitions do get muted over time, and as between different cultural patterns. Even aesthetics is a subjective concept: my aesthetics is mine, yours is severely yours. If you cannot comprehend my aesthetics, no amount of argumen-

ment season. This year that alibi will not quite wash, but I am sure the dialecticians of the UF would be able to extricate themselves by issuing a clever-by-half, quasi-urgent argument in favour of a *status quo*, and a *status quo* which is the legacy of Dr P. C. Ghosh. They would only be defending themselves, or perhaps not even that.

* * *

Four things are important enough for discussion in West Bengal's food policy: quantum of procurement of paddy (or rice), method of procurement, procurement prices, and finally, the so-called delivery bonus which is paid in addition to the procurement price. Suddenly, there is very little talk of the old promises to take over completely the trade in food grains, to extend to each and every village the public distribution system, and to procure one million tonnes or more of rice. For the coming season, the Agricultural Prices Commission, with some trepidation, has suggested that Bengal could procure may be around 600,000 tonnes of rice: after all, the crop is going to be excellent once more, and non-leftist governments in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have done much better procurement from out of a lower size output and considerably lower level of prices. The way news from official sources have been allowed to filter out, the West Bengal Government would be prepared to consider procuring 600,000 tonnes of rice provided its other conditions are met. These include the significant ones that procurement prices must not be lowered, and the delivery bonus must be continued to be paid, including the bonus to the rice millers.

Three seasons ago, rice and paddy procurement prices in West Bengal were more or less on par with the prices in the other major paddy-raising States like Orissa, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. Entered Dr P. C. Ghosh, the standard-bearer of the jotedar, and procurement prices in this State were overnight hiked to fantastic levels, so that they are now about the highest in the country. In most other States, the procurement price for paddy ranges between Rs.

45 and Rs. 48 per quintal; in West Bengal, it is Rs. 56.75—if you throw in the bonus, the effective price is Rs. 62.12 per quintal. For whose benefit is this high price? Since West Bengal does not send out any rice, the incidence of the high price is borne in entirety by the consumers in the State. Since the overwhelming proportion of the procurement is from the affluent peasants, no part of the benefit of the high price flows down to the small peasants or share-croppers either. No, the high procurement price in force here is a deliberate act of perverse income distribution: to take away money from the lower middle class and the working population—who are exclusively dependent on the ration and fair price shops for the surplus of rice and to hand it over to the jotedars.

In the market, following last year's good *aman* crop, rice prices have come down in most West Bengal districts by anywhere between 25 and 30 per cent; even the seasonal increase during the rains has been mild. Rice prices in Contai, for example, were barely higher than those in neighbouring Balasore in Orissa. Come November, as the new harvest is unloaded, prices would no doubt dip even more. A marginal lowering of procurement prices could have provided some relief to the poor consumers, and this lowering would have been very much in keeping with the market trends. But a reduction in prices will squeeze the jotedars; and how could the UF Government countenance such a proposal?

* * *

The story is the same with the so-called delivery bonus. The bonus was in the beginning intended to induce the farmer to sell rice or paddy to the Government agents within a certain date, but now the bonus is being applied *all round the year*. Since the bulk of the procurement in West Bengal is from the millers, the bonus too in large part accrues to them; or, if not to them, only to the big dealers. There is no way of checking whether the millers and dealers in their turn hand down the bonus to the peasants from whom they obtain the paddy. The rich jotedars certainly get their share;

the small farmers, who are forced to sell out their grain soon after harvest, are invariably denied their share.

* * *

Which brings me to the method of procurement. The UF programme mentions a 100 per cent levy on the millers. But the civil servants have advised the Front leaders against pushing through such a folly, and therefore the talk of nationalising the rice mills is now taboo. Direct purchases from the farmers, either through a levy or otherwise, are out too: the great leftists in the West Bengal Government instead procure, unless from the mills, only through the agents, who are invariably either rich dealers or the good old jotedars themselves.

The UF leadership does not consist of idiots. They know the implications of what they are doing. Which brings one back to my theme of nepotism. The agency system has its uses; even the jotedars can be rendered to perform a social function. If kickbacks can be arranged to political funds, it is thus possible to discover virtues in Dr P. C. Ghosh's pernicious system. I don't know for sure whether this is in fact what is happening: I can only listen to gossip, and speculate. Even Marx had two alternative definitions

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for the category —: call it the rate

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of exploitation, or, under changed circumstances, call it the rate of surplus value—the latter sounds so much more respectable.

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Spreading Confusion

READER

EVER since the ouster of Mr Morarji Desai, the Prime Minister has been busy going round the country projecting the image of her Government in Delhi. Though bank nationalisation has not yet been followed by any other announcement, Mrs Gandhi and at least some of her colleagues have managed to keep afloat expectations that other things would also happen. Her long discussions with the Chief Ministers of States which she visits, with representatives of both industrialists and workers and in general with anyone who chooses to submit a memorandum, have created the impression that something is up her sleeves.

All this has also created some confusion in people's minds. And Mrs Gandhi not exactly helps matters herself. At Calcutta and elsewhere she has gone on record as having rejected as rumours talk of further nationalisation and at the same time has stressed the need for having a socialist society. Phrases such as "social tensions must be removed" have not perhaps been entirely dismissed; as on previous occasions, as mere crap; yet what does it mean when the next sentence in the same speech is that in the Indian economy the private sector could easily co-exist and thrive with the public sector and there should be no cause for any conflict? One feels that for the first time, businessmen also have become less sure of their knowledge of Indian policy, and have become somewhat confused. Does Mrs Gandhi thereby take another stride towards socialism?

This is somewhat apparent from editorials in the *Financial Express*, one of the major dailies in the country dealing with economic matters. It says, two snags are implied in the Prime Minister's decision to hold the finance portfolio, which would help her lord over the entire economic policy. In the first place because of her onerous duties as Prime Min-

ister, she cannot devote enough time to the consideration of basic issues underlying the economic policy. Secondly, in her bid to rally the masses around her she has pitched up their expectations as well and how far these can be met is a matter of political judgment which will have to be weighed against the economic consequences. Again it should also be noted that the people's confidence in the Government has been rudely shaken not because of any action of the Government itself but because of the wild talk of some of her colleagues. Finally there are administrative limitations which cannot be eradicated overnight. The Prime Minister will have to take into account the situation in its totality while carving out her policies and sorting the priorities. This will not be easy and the country will have to watch with anxious interest the impact of the new style of the Union Government.

The paper says it is a new style. Whether it likes it is not immediately clear. The limitations it speaks of were always there. The people have always been made to expect things from the Government which it has always failed to provide. Confidence in the Government consequently has already been shaken. And the administrative machinery has never been known to function smoothly anywhere in the country. If these arguments should be taken to mean that the Goenka-owned paper does not like Mrs Gandhi holding the portfolio, it has not said so. The attitude is certainly far from clear.

Commenting on the Prime Minister's talks with the West Bengal Chief Minister, the *Economic Times* has said that while the State's finances were certainly in a precarious condition, Mr Ajoy Mukherjee's claim for a share in the management of nationalised banks would lead to dis-

persal in control which might stand in the way of an orderly working of national priorities. The claim has also been made by Tamil Nadu and Mysore, and the Jains are not prepared (judging from the editorial) to allow any other sector, except the western, to have any control over the country's finances. The paper rejected the West Bengal Government's plea for a revision of the Finance Commission award and thought it strange that the Prime Minister should have agreed to consider suggestions for staggering the repayment of loans to the Centre. Referring to Mrs Gandhi's talks with industrialists in Calcutta, the paper said the latter's plea for industrial peace and discipline can hardly be contested. Thus the Prime Minister was indirectly advised to see that there was no change in the Union Government's attitude towards West Bengal.

News Corporations

The Union Information Minister, Mr I. K. Gujral's recent announcement of the proposal to turn four news agencies into corporations was interesting. While details of the Government proposal have, as usual, been slow to come in, the general feeling has been that with this the Government would impose some control on the distribution of news.

Though control of the Press is not always undesirable, one wonders why news agencies should have been picked up. None of these are owned by anyone who is not also a newspaper magnate. Both the major agencies, PTI and UNI, are supposed to be non-profit making organisations, owned by the big newspaper owners themselves who nominate their own representatives to the board of directors. If the Government really wished to confront these people then why did it not take up the newspapers themselves? Or has there been some sort of an agreement between the Information Ministry and the Indian and Eastern Newspapers Society that the Press barons would allow a portion of their control over news agencies curbed, provided the Government does not interfere with the other, the more

lucrative source of income which is also a stronger medium of propaganda? As Mr Gujral was making his announcement, the Prime Minister was telling members of the Delhi Press Club that the Government had no desire to nationalise newspapers. Was it a mere coincidence that these two statements were being made at the same time, on the same day?

Also what has caused the Prime Minister who had been so virulent in her attacks against the Press only the other day, to become lukewarm all of a sudden? While the details will perhaps never be known, one fears that the understanding between the two camps, which one had almost thought was not inevitable, has been reached. The Press perhaps has saved its skin.

rent convention need not be adopted. The point is that a particular weighting scheme may be adequate for one purpose and not for others: for instance, if a ton of rice is a perfect substitute in a consumer's utility function for a ton of any other cereal, then from the point of view of the welfare of this consumer, only his aggregate consumption (in terms of weight) of all cereals is the relevant measure. However if the production conditions of different cereals are different, then the same aggregate will be inadequate for predicting input requirements.

Prof Rudra places a rather heavy emphasis on the notion of "true value" of a variable. According to him, in the natural sciences, the basic assumption underlying all measurement is that, "given an object of measurement B, there is a unique measure associated with it, namely β ". Though the existence of such a unique measure is 'self-evident' in most cases, nevertheless it is to be noted that it is an assumption, and it gains its credibility from the assertion that once a procedure of measurement is adopted, and repeated measurements on the same object are taken, the average of measurement will converge to β in probability as the number of measurements tend to infinity. A moment's reflection will show that this assertion cannot be given an operational meaning since any attempt to do so by adopting the frequency definition of probability (and the other two schools mentioned by Dr Rudra, namely the logical and subjectivist school, are useless for this purpose) leads to the well-known problem of infinite regress. Given this, this reviewer does not consider it very serious that the concept of 'true value' and measurement error is not applicable in the case of economic variables such as National Income or Index Number of Wholesale Prices. Once the procedure of obtaining such constructs including the weights to be assigned or imputations to be made is specified, what is wrong in assuming that the measure so obtained is itself the "true value"?

Book Review

Econometrics

T. N. SRINIVASAN

MEASUREMENT IN ECONOMICS
By Ashok Rudra
Allied Publishers, Calcutta. Pp. 82.
Rs 7

IN this short and stimulating book consisting of three chapters and five appendices, Prof Ashok Rudra raises a number of important issues concerning the very foundations of econometric methodology and applications. The book begins with the chapter on Aggregation and Index Numbers. Prof Rudra asserts that: (1) 'all of economic statistics are of the nature of aggregates and index numbers' (p. 1), (2) 'very little work has up till now been done in developing ideas as to what constitutes a good index number or a good aggregate from the point of view of economics' (p 5), (3) '....Theory of (Statistical) Inference....is not of much help in problems of measurement in economics' (p 5), (4) 'Consistency of an *a priori* micro-theory, with an analogy based macro-theory ought not be the criterion for judging the goodness of aggregation. Goodness of aggregation ought to be judged on criteria which are independent of any particular macro-theories, and macro-theories ought to be formulated after one has decided upon the mode of aggregation' (p 7), (5) '....wider the basis of aggregation, less would be the cumulative error' (p 4).

It is possible to hold the view that

every object of creation whether of nature or of man is unique and no two objects are commensurate. Prof Rudra surely will deny holding such a fundamental view of measurement (economic or other) even though some of his remarks on heterogeneity of economic objects in the first chapter suggest the contrary. In his Appendix A he seems to take a more practical view that some types of heterogeneity can be and are ignored: as an instance he mentions the commodity group 'foodgrains', the unit of measurement being the weight unit. Such objects he calls 'quasi homogeneous'. But the 'index of industrial production', being a weighted average of the changes in output of different industries compared to a base year is a 'heterogeneous construct.' This distinction between 'quasi-homogeneous' and 'heterogeneous' objects is something that this reviewer fails to understand. It seems to him that adding tons of output of rice of different qualities and tons of wheat output etc. and obtaining a 'quasi-homogeneous' foodgrains output is not different conceptually from the construction of index numbers of industrial production. The fact that there is no unique weighting scheme for construction of an index number of industrial production is of no relevance here since the measurement of foodgrains output, in the way it is done, is a matter of convention and there is an *a priori* reason why a diffe-

Economic Variables

Prof Rudra takes again an equally extreme position when he asserts that the calculus of probability and the Theory of Statistical Inference are inapplicable to economic variables for two reasons. Firstly, economic variables cannot be considered random variables coming from a well-defined population (natural, artificial or hypothetical). Secondly, there is the well-known and oft-asserted constraint on the economist that he cannot perform controlled experiments to generate his data. The first reason is extremely unconvincing. Prof Rudra's assertions that "econometricians... have treated...whatever is an unpredictable variable, as a *random* variable....Any unpredictable variable is not a random variable" (pp 67-68) : are nothing but restatements of his view that economic variables are not *random* variables. I say this because, to me, an unpredictable variable is one which is not a *random* variable in the sense of having a well-defined probability distribution (a variable which can be predicted with certainty can also be treated as a *random* variable which takes a given value with probability one). Saying that econometricians treat unpredictables as random variables does not constitute a proof that economic variables are unpredictable in the above sense and hence are not random variables. The constraint on the economist mentioned in Prof Rudra's second reason is of course a very real constraint. But even in the so-called 'experiments under controlled conditions', some factors often exist that are either impossible or very costly to control. Such factors are usually taken care of through the process of 'Randomisation'. As Prof Rudra himself points out, the probabilistic foundation of inferences based on randomisation are shaky.

Some objections of Prof Rudra such as those relating to the meaning of probability statements and the notion of a confidence interval are of relevance (as emphasized by himself) to the entire theory of Mathematical Statistics and not merely to Econometrics. I shall not therefore

comment on them. I do not however subscribe to his view that the residual term in econometrics is necessarily non-stochastic. Let me illustrate. Suppose I postulate that the 'expected' or 'normal' (in the absence of any change in policy variables) relationship between aggregate consumption (C_t) and aggregate disposable income (Y_t) is linear. But actual consumption C_t can differ from the expected consumption $a+b(Y)$ for that year by a random disturbance term U_t . This disturbance term can be thought of as representing the influence of such random factors such as weather. One could further postulate that U_t is independently and identically distributed with mean zero and an unknown variance s^2 . These postulates (for the present assuming away the simultaneity in the determination of levels of consumption and income) enable one to apply Least Squares Theory to obtain BLU estimates for a and b . The fact that C_t and Y_t are constructs and not homogeneous quantities (to use Prof Rudra's terms) does not affect such an application as long as the method of obtaining such constructs remain the same and the postulated relationship holds. One could legitimately then test the adequacy of the postulated relationship as well as the assumptions on the residual terms provided one has observations on C and Y over a long enough period without major shifts in policy variables that are likely to influence the relationship between C and Y .

Curiously enough Prof Rudra seems to hold a view analogous to the one expressed above when it comes to the relationship between Macro-Theory and Micro-Theory. He is certainly right in arguing that relationships among a set of macro-variables could be postulated and tested regardless of the implications of such relationships to the received Micro-Theory. One may however find it desirable in some situations that the macro-relation be obtained through an aggregation of micro-relations. For instance, a policy instrument such as an indirect commo-

dity tax may have its effect on a set of micro-relations. This effect can be computed from the parameters of a macro-relation provided such a relation is obtained through a fully specified aggregation procedure from the affected micro-relations. A similar but not identical problem arises in contrasting structural estimation and reduced form estimation. For a number of purposes including prediction, it is enough to know the values of the parameters of the reduced form as long as the structure remains the same; however, for other purposes, including the evaluation of the effects of alternative economic policies, one may have to know the values of structural parameters.

Prof Rudra's 'proof' that the wider the basis of aggregation, the less would be the cumulative effect of the errors of measurement, depends on an unstated assumption that the errors (defined as the ratio of the deviation of an observation from its true value to the true value) of different components of an aggregate are independent of each other and have the same variance. If the errors in different components are positively correlated with each other, then his 'proof' will not go through. It must be said however, that the independence assumption is more plausible than the identical variance assumption.

Production Functions

The second chapter deals with production functions. Prof Rudra discusses a set of sufficient conditions under which one can estimate the production function that obtains at the level of the firm based on aggregative data relating to groups of firms. He then goes on to illustrate how unlikely that these conditions are met and suggests that 'engineering production functions based on 'blue-print' data are likely to be more meaningful. Though I find a lot with which I agree, I am not quite clear whether Prof Rudra would like to retain the concept of macro-production function, discarding all attempts to provide a micro-underpinning for it (in consonance with

his views on the relationship between Macro and Micro theories) or he would like to discard the concept of production function (macro as well as micro) altogether and work in terms of 'blue-prints' or activities themselves. I prefer the latter because of its flexibility in applications.

The third and last chapter of the book deals with demand functions and is an excellent review of the theoretical literature and the empirical applications relating to Indian data. Prof Rudra is at his best here. This is to be expected given his valuable contributions to the area. However a few mildly critical remarks are in order. Prof Rudra has failed even to mention the problems arising from the simultaneity in the determination of equilibrium price and quantity demanded (and supplied). This problem is relevant to a greater extent to the time series estimates than to cross section estimates though even in the latter, the assumption that the same relative prices are faced by each unit (household, State, region) is heroic indeed! For all his earlier assertions about all economic variables being aggregates and the evils thereof, Prof Rudra calmly accepts the coarse commodity groupings of the National Sample Survey data. In discussing the relative merits and demerits of the estimates of expenditure elasticities based on cross-section and time series data, he suggests that the 'quality of projections should be the criterion of selection. Usually 'quality of projection is measured by the standard error of forecast. I find this a bit unrealistic. Presumably one makes projection in econometrics, not for their own sake, but in relation to some economic decision or other. As such one should relate the error of forecast to the social loss involved in taking a decision based on it. It is by no means clear why the expected loss should be a function of only the standard error of forecast and not of other characteristics of the error distribution as well. Incidentally, Prof Rudra reproduces a table (Table

4, p. 48) from the work of Pushpam Joseph to show that the projection based on time series elasticities are closer to actual in respect of the consumption of some commodities. It

would have been a great help if the year for which the projections were made as well as the units in which the numbers in the table are measured had also been given.

The Crisis Of Conscience

EST. 1878

MOHIM

ROODRO

THIS is not a new issue. Rather over-use of it has somewhat made it stale matter. And that's the danger of words, we spin them out, weave them in, we debate and discuss, until it begins to feel as if the problem was over, there is nothing more to talk about; yet beyond the lace curtain of words remains the issue unscathed.

Whenever we talk about crisis of conscience, we have convenient bins to push the matter into—change of social order, political pattern, greater issues, larger perspectives, in the long run, etc etc. But the fact is, no matter what social order you purport to bring about, no matter what new haven you mean to create, nothing can come right if your conscience is not clear today.

And the fact is, we are corrupt in our day-to-day lives. We are corrupt when we scream of the new society; we are revolutionaries, and at the same time petty and spineless in issues that confront us. And I do not believe a new society, a better society, can be ever brought about, built and nurtured by people who in their daily lives have already forsaken honesty.

Let us take a small instance, to begin with. The bridegroom lives in a Western country, is settled there. He comes home to find a bride. He finds a bride. He has over his years abroad forgotten the desire to take dowry as his price for being a male. No, he tells quite clearly, he does not want anything, just the daughter will do. He is honest. He has everything in his home in the West. He needs no extra things. His father agrees. But the elder brother, here comes the crook, the elder brother starts a vilification campaign against

the daughter's side, without his father and brother knowing it.

However, the point I am going to make is somewhere else. The daughter's side consists of many leftists—and one or two Europe returneds(!). They feel it is in the fitness of things that they at least should give some furniture etc. to the bridegroom, though the bridegroom cannot carry the stuff with him to his place of residence. And what's more, they succumb to the snarls of the elder brother and start to weigh up the gold in his terms. And this they do, knowing full well that, all those chairs and tables and sofas and what-nots are to be used by the elder brother.

Here you are, progressive(?), educated, up-to-date (?) and yet consciously perpetuating an evil system, and stupendously, for it is done in spite of the bridegroom himself.

This is the level from where I begin to scour. Not the front garden but the backyard, not the ante-room and the lounge but the kitchen and the bathroom.

So many of the smart Presidency College boys are today employed all over the place as public relations men. What fine bejewelled morgues they are in. Yet these boys were the prize boys, most of them the luminous stars of their years, the pride of the professors of the college, the heartbeat boys of many pretty girls—and, really, this is true, quite a number of them were leftists of different denominations. Where are they now? In the profession of peddling lies. These shiny boys have been bought up with the silver jingle to advertise banal lies for their employers. And to bend down to their knees when their superiors are around, and to

work until nine in the evening and over the weekends, and to eat, drink, smoke, dream public-relations scented lies, day in and day out.

And the lawyers. What a fabulous profession where only money counts and truth is a billion miles away! The income-tax lawyer's job is not to tell you exactly how much you have to pay up, but precisely how much you can cheat the State. The State, paradoxically, is not us. We shout patriotism, we drink nationalism, we snivel sentimentally at our different national songs, we fall off our beds fighting the Chinese in our dreams, we do all these but we do not believe in paying the taxes.

A lawyer is a good lawyer who wins the case for anybody who pays the lucre, not one who fights to establish truth.

Oh, the poor lawyers, why pick on them only? What about the doctors? All the big multi-storey homes that so many doctors have built in the expensive areas of Calcutta, let's face it, are built from money that has been cheated from taxe. How much does a doctor pay in taxes? who maintains any record of what he receives? And what about all the false certificates that he dishes out like potato chips to whoever comes for them?

The accountants and the auditors, what glorious professions! The art of being a big accountant lies in the tricks he knows to cheat the government of taxes, in his magid abilities to show profits as losses, in keeping duplicate accounts, to advise the client as to how to manipulate them so that nobody knows where the truth lies. Taking it on a personal and subtle level, there is an example of how duplicate value run us down, a gentleman, an accountant by profession who rose into high-salaried brackets keeping accounts for a brewery when he himself was a strict Gandhiite and an anti-drink man.

Dishonesty and Dichotomy

And thus runs the gamut of dishonesty and dichotomy. Alas! Anybody who has ever been entrusted to look for a "good boy" (literal from

bhalo chheley in Bengali) for somebody's daughter knows that a *bhalo chheley* in our terms means somebody from one of these professions. It doesn't matter if the boy is a cheat, a bribe-taker, a double-crosser, an adulteration expert—so long as he is in one of these professions, he is a *bhalo chheley*. *Bhalo* (good) is not measured in terms of conscientiousness but money. Even a fellow who claims that he brings in excess money, meaning bribe money, gets instead of reprimand a premium.

And the teachers who don't teach. Teachers make many legitimate demands for amelioration of their wretched condition. That nearly all their demands are well worth immediate redress and that they are a long suffering lot, need no repetition to at least the readers of this journal. But many fail to keep themselves equally aware of the needs of the students. I know of one technical institution where most of the teachers do not teach, and bribe-money flourishes because the head of the institution himself is in the habit of asking the students for it. Of course, in academic and educated parlance an unsavoury word like bribing is not really used, a sweeter yet equally potent word, loan, is used. A loan a student gives never to be returned. Who are these teachers? They are right here, amongst us, they are your cousin and my brother-in-law and somebody else's son-in-law. We all play our cards and chess and ludo together. The doctors, the lawyers the teachers, the PROs. Didn't you have a nice scintillating evening at so and so PRO's house the other day, and really the other day the PRO from so and so literally established that Mao Tsetung was the only living force that can save India.

The question is if it is possible to live truthfully according to one's conscience is it possible in this present society which is ridden with conflicts of interest, which is ruled by self-centred motivations of profit and exploitation? For instance, a man who works for an advertising company. Does he have a choice to tell the truth when his company is vowed to the art

of lying? That advertising is a dangerous game is too obvious, it is the all-out pimps' profession. The pimp tells you that there is a French lady waiting for you but the beguiled, sexually driven discovers a Park Circus hag nagging him for quick money. The advertiser is paid to sell, and sell he will by hook or by crook—by sex or by keeping up with the Joneses—unless he is exceptionally lucky to land himself in an account which needs no lies. Mister, such a happening is rare. What does a commercial artist do when he finds himself advertising the Ambassador car when he knows how rotten it is? What does the teacher do when he knows that the curriculum he has to pass his students through is absurd, impossible to finish, unrealistic and unnecessary? What does he do when he finds himself teaching a thing that he knows is obsolete, in a method that is archaic? Has the individual a role to play? Can an individual take a stand, independent of other considerations, solely on the basis of his own conscience?

This question should not arise. There should be no two ways about it, Each individual must at any cost stand by his conscience. If he is not conscience-aware today, what a damned, awful society he will build when he gets a chance! No matter what castle one dreams of building, it is the individual bricks that have to be strong and well made. If individuals allow themselves to be rotten now, it would be nonsensical (a) to dream that rotten people will build an unrotten society; and (b), to imagine that conversely the moment a new society is forcibly brought about all the rotten individuals will like magic turn into gold.

Whether we succeed or not, the only chink of hope lies in going on trying to live by conscience. And very special situations apart, in good many cases the individual has the choice even today when his surroundings are hostile to the ideal state. Much of the slovenliness will go if one can face up to the fact that one has some choice of being honest, at a price one must be ready to pay.

Rumanian Films

PRABODH KUMAR MAITRA

OVER the last fifteen years the East European film scene has witnessed the emergence of a dedicated group of film-makers with experimenting spirit and a deep sense of commitment that arises out of an involvement with the human situation and a serious approach to cinema as a form of artistic expression. Despite occasional aberrations, due to the recalcitrance of the authorities to let these people have the right of uninhibited expression, the creative world of film-making has been remarkably consistent and full of surprising revelations. First Poland and then Czechoslovakia set the pace, with the Hungarians and the East Germans on the periphery. Bulgaria and Yugoslavia soon followed suit with confidence, assurance and a sense of pride in their achievements. Rumania has also made a start, but to

go by the latest festival of films which cover the last ten years, it has not made the grade. Considering the prodigious contribution of their counterparts the unfortunate fact remains that the Rumanians have not arrived yet.

Two directors have two films each. Francise Munteanu's *Four Steps to the Infinite* with which the festival started is a woman's film in which the revolutionary zeal is well matched by a yearning for romance. Its gimmickry titles are more suited to a suspense thriller. The locale however is well exploited. The relationship of the girl and the resistance hero has the predictable consequences. The girl's parents are portrayed in stark black and white, a hardly credible characterisation in the circumstances.

The same director's *The Sky has no Ears* concerns the gradual in-

vovement of a wide-eyed young artist in political turmoil. Again a rather pedestrian treatment of the theme that there is no escape from commitment in the days of the country's struggle for liberation.

Sunday at 6 O'clock and *The Danube Goes its Way* are also variations of scenes of the resistance movement. While *The Danube* is straightforward narration of the travail, *Sunday* is more ambitious. Much of it is bleached white and a considerable part is semi-darkness. It seems that silhouetted human figures have a fascination for the director. The atmosphere is well handled but the effect might have been better if experimental overtures were a little less obtrusive. The sound effects are often a muffled mixture.

A Bomb Was Stolen by Ion Gopo has an intriguing start in the vast plains where science fiction characters carry on their operations to track down a seeming offender. What follows is a rollicking reel of situations rich in imaginative detail. Sound

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effects and music form an important part. It draws heavily on the silent cinema, not merely because it is without any dialogue. An assortment of characters replete with faces and gestures reminiscent of Keaton, Hardy and folks from thither offer a variety of funny situations. The sequence at the showhouse where the stills displayed outside are brilliantly utilised to give an effect of the film on view inside, is highly inventive. The show over, the audience composed of children, women and men pour out wearing their reactions on their faces. Its only flaw is that it is somewhat repetitive. But a refreshing film.

The same director's *Step to the Moon* seems highly derivative from Rene Clair's *Beauties of the Night*. In his enthusiasm to treat us to the progress of man's journey towards the moon the director indulges in exercises in fantasy. The recurrence of situations takes away from the effects desired and the director very much allows himself to be swept off his feet.

The only film in colour, *Codin*, by Henri Colpi is a Franco-Russian production. Some isolated sequences stand out for their colour, composition and landscape. But it is an uneven film in which the last few minutes give the director the much needed grip which he strangely lacks in the beginning. The principal character's elemental fury has an effective counterpoint in the placid mother of the boy. The senselessness of society, the cruelty to which people used to be subjected in the period so well brought out. Codin's destruction at the hands of her own mother in the last scene shakes with its coldblooded cruelty.

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Letters

Durgapur

The reported decision of the UF to introduce legislative measures for eradication of corruption from the administration is welcome but will the UF succeed? Take, Durgapur. Not a single recommendation of the Suku Sen Committee has been implemented; corrupt and wayward officials are snug in their positions of power and there has been a sharp deterioration in the administration thanks to the selection of an incompetent person as the Chief Executive of the Project, by Mr Dhara himself. The result has been disastrous. Even shady deals like the purchase of transformers whose rated capacity is much below that specified for the Project's 'A' zone grid sub-station, which resulted in a loss of Rs 7 to 8 lakhs in terms of transformer costs only, are being hushed up with the connivance of the Managing Director.

Intrigues plague the DPL, and the loss for 1968-69 is estimated at Rs 2 crores 78 lakhs. With the frequent breakdowns in power plant the total loss would be staggering in the next financial year. But exhortations by the employees to hold an unbiased technical enquiry into the causes of failures of vital electrical equipment, and non-utilisation of plants are ignored. Strange as it may seem, the fact remains that the labour representatives, notably the Bangla Congress and CPI representatives, are either reticent or evasive in their conversation.

We therefore cannot but believe that legislative measure or no legislative measure, eradication of corruption would remain a chimera so long as legislators themselves indulge in malpractices, nepotism, suppression of facts and other misdeeds.

A. K. BOSE
A. GANGULI
Durgapur

Socialism Indira-Style

It is becoming clear that the conflict in the Congress is nothing but group politics. Mrs Gandhi is trying to put up a radical image only to have a strong mass base and thus to remove her antagonists from the organisational strongholds. It is getting clear that her socialism may at best become the capitalism of the upper middle class. If that be the case, under what considerations did the communist parties support Indira Gandhi in the Presidential election, only to stabilise her position? Instead, had polarisation of different parties taken place in clear terms it would have helped the Left parties to achieve their long-term goals. It would be much better if rightist parties like the Swatantra and Jana Sangh come into prominence now. The clash will be more intense and may culminate into total annihilation of these reactionary parties from the Indian political scene.

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directly to the people over the heads of the leaders who had deserted him. The end was the consummation of a death-wish which had over-whelmed him in the closing months of his life. He had ample warning, but he preferred to ignore it in the hope that he might achieve in death what had eluded him in life. His supreme sacrifice was his final admonition to his wayward followers and perhaps also to himself, because his own mixture of politics with religion, his pursuit of Ram Rajya, was a dangerous concoction.

His hope of communal amity has been belied. Persecution of neither the Harijans nor the Muslims has ceased. They remain victims of gross tribalism. From reports that appear from time to time it would seem that the Harijan-hunting that is rampant in some parts of the country is no less savage than head-hunting. Gandhi wanted untouchability to be shunned as sin; in the present dispensation it has ceased to be even a crime, despite the Statute. Communal riots continue to take their annual tolls in life and property because the Government hardly intervenes effectively before passions have spent themselves out. In 1964, there were as many as 1,070 Hindu-Muslim riots, an all-time record. The figure came down to 132 in 1966; since then it has been steadily rising as if to mock the approaching centenary. There were 220 riots in 1967 and 346 in 1968, almost one riot a day. In the first three months of the current year there were 101 riots, and for all one knows, last year's performance has already been surpassed. No State is free from the scourge, not even those where united fronts of the left rule. Gujarat, Gandhi's own State, has now come forward to provide an ironic curtain-raiser to the centenary celebration. Starting in Ahmedabad city violence spread in the districts, and more than 300 people are reported to have been killed and 300 injured in the clashes. The Savarmati Harijan Ashram, "hallowed", as the newspapers say, by the memory of the Mahatma, has not been spared. After two days of unabated rioting the Congress Government of the State realised the need of

stern action; troops were called out, and a curfew was imposed. Why such measures are not taken at the first sign of violence is a recurring question that is never answered. It may be more than a chance coincidence that communal violence has broken out in Gandhi's home State on the eve of the centenary celebration. There is no dearth of people

in the country who do not like the quiet burial that Gandhism is being given; they resent even the lip-service that is proposed to be paid to Gandhi in the centenary year. An orgy of communal hatred and violence is their form of protest, and aided by official inaction, they have succeeded in making a mockery of the proposed celebration.

Fasting Unto Merger

Chandigarh is believed to be Nehru's dream city. Money, squeezed from common people of the country, was made available to Le Corbusier, who, thereafter, had no difficulty in converting the surrealist dream into a concrete city. Unfortunately, Mr Nehru's dream has become a nightmare for his daughter. In December 1966 Sant Fateh Singh and his six followers were about to jump into *agon kunds* built in Akal Takht, because Chandigarh was denied to Punjab. Fortunately for the Sant and his co-sacrificers, Sardar Hukam Singh found out a body-saving formula—the problem was referred to Mrs Gandhi for arbitration. It was a problem indeed, because the Shah Commission had awarded the city to Haryana on linguistic grounds. The Punjabis considered the Commission a hoax, for it abided by the 1961 census which showed deliberately Punjabi-speaking areas as Hindi-speaking. Because the Punjabis raised hell over the unabashed act of Hindi imperialism, Chandigarh was made a Union territory and Mrs Gandhi, the unwilling arbiter, got a breathing space. But she was not aware that the *kunds* were preserved in the Golden Temple intact, as mementos of the Sant's fast. Now with Mr Darshan Singh Pheruman, the revered Swatantra leader, well on his way since August 15 to self-immolation in the same *kunds*, a necessity has arisen for a transfer in the name of the sacrificer, assuring that the Akalis intend to make the mementos perennial. The Sant is quite understandably aggrieved for the loss of the mementos. And with him equally aggrieved is the Akali Dal, the ruling part-

ner in Punjab, because the State Congress, in a bid to dislodge the Akali-Jana Sangh combine from the ministry, is fanning the *agon kund* with commensurate vigour.

Mrs Gandhi, however, cannot placate the Punjab Congress party without choking the Haryana Congress party, which enjoys only a slender majority in the Assembly and will collapse if Chandigarh is used as a sop to the *kund*. It has set up Mr Uday Singh Mann for conducting another fast unto merger with Haryana. Caught between Pheruman and Mann, Mrs Gandhi, after all a woman, is further confused to see the Himachal Pradesh Congress party too join the fury. It demands adequate compensation if Chandigarh is merged either with Punjab or Haryana.

It can be however a golden opportunity for Mrs Gandhi for gaining a majority for the Congress party in Punjab, if only the Golden Temple is spared the ashes of Feruman. The Akali Dal is already showing signs of a split over the issue, with Mr G. S. Rarewala threatening to join the Congress with a number of followers, if the Akali Chief Minister cannot save Chandigarh for Punjab. Mr Gurnam Singh was left with no other one-upmanship than a threat of Punjab's secession from India, unless the problem was speedily solved. Mrs Gandhi is posing as if she had a solution up her sleeves.

Whatever the solution may be for this made-to-order problem, it cannot be said that the common people will be affected in any way. It is entirely a game for the leaders who can think up no other gimmicks for sensational fun. The same is true about

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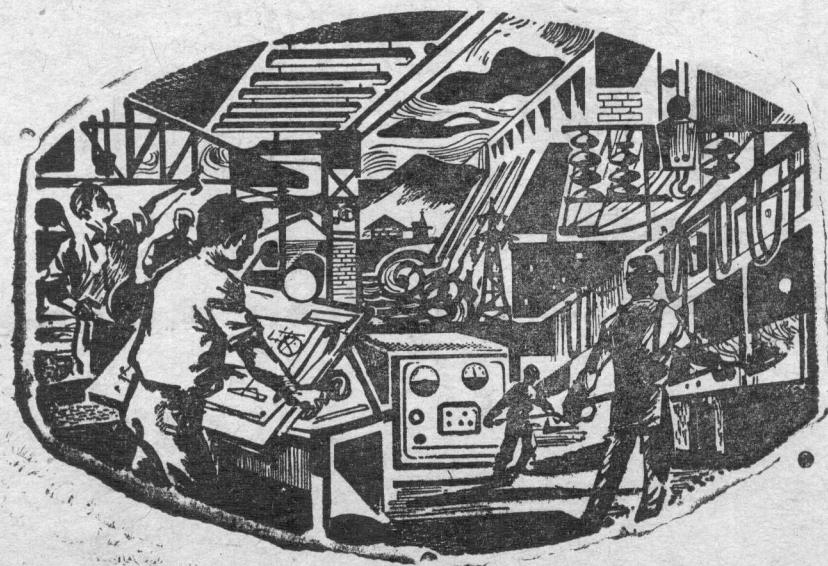
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the related problem of the Bhakra complex. Who will manage the dam—Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh or Rajasthan? Whoever gets the management, will get a slightly better source of revenue. But is that a prospect inspiring enough for common people to be plunged into any *kund*? Bhakra, just like Chandigarh, was built more as a tourist attraction than a project which could have been considered the ideal way of solving the country's irrigation or electricity problems. It is truly the Taj Mahal of modern India, as Nehru proudly called it, but

in a sense other than what Nehru had in his mind. Built lavishly on people's money, it remains a monument to Nehru's fetish of modernism, his love of vainglory, his attempt to divert people's attention from the fundamental issues to a few show-pieces. The heavy cost of constructing the dam has led to high irrigation rates which peasants cannot afford to pay and so irrigation facilities remain unutilised. Nehru or his successors have done nothing to raise the level of demand for irrigated water through other general measures for the advancement of agriculture.

ing into the merits of specific allegations it should be permissible to suggest that as the largest and most important constituent of the Front the CPI(M) should have been able to project a more convincing image of mature impartiality than it has in fact done. Take the Baranagar incident, for example. The CPI(M) may be perfectly justified in opposing arrests merely on the basis of statements by injured persons; individuals against whom charges have been made by the injured may be perfectly innocent; but, in that case, it is the duty of the police to find out the guilty and act against them. This certainly is not an impossible task. A correspondent last week quoted Lenin's stern instructions against any leniency towards offences committed by party members. "It is a crying shame", Lenin said, "...the ruling party defends 'its own' scoundrels". All parties in the Front would do well to ponder this.

What is to be done? At last week's meeting of the Front, Mr Somnath Lahiri made some proposals for a month's truce. But why for a month? The Front was due to meet on Wednesday to discuss the issue again, but the outcome is not known at the time of writing. What is needed, however, is more a sincere heart-searching by all concerned than a document of verbal compromise. The parties lining up against the CPI(M) must examine their own record too; the CPI(M), on its part, would perhaps gain more from leadership of a willing united group than from attempts to extend its influence forcibly to areas now controlled by individual members of the group. It would be tragic if purely local and short-term objectives take precedence over wider considerations, if tactical motivations become stronger than strategic discipline. It is no longer possible to dismiss the disputes in the Front as ordinary family feuds. No disputes are more disastrous than some in a Hindu joint family.

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Family Feuds

The "beauty" of the United Front, said Mr Harekrishna Konar last week, was that, while its members fought one another, they were also able to settle their differences easily by discussion. The beauty would have impressed the public if the agreements reached from time to time had prevented further clashes. The mounting tempo of totally inglorious and possibly suicidal in-fighting had apparently had some chastening effect by the time the Front met last week. Several reasonable proposals were made, and all recognized the need for putting an immediate end to the inter-party clashes. Later, the Chief Minister told reporters that a "bold step" had been taken towards the resolution of a crisis threatening the Front. Yet, on the very day Mr Ajoy Mukherjee was exuding such optimism in Calcutta, ghastly incidents occurred in a Dooars tea garden. It is difficult to decide who was to blame for what, but the way an Assistant Manager of a tea estate was done to death seemed to have little to do with revolutionary ruthlessness. We are not forgetting the CPI(M) supporters who died there or near Dhanbad, nor are we unaware of the dubious role of the SSP. Nor, for that matter, do we believe that the life of a well-paid tea estate official is more valuable than an ordinary worker's. What we find distasteful is cruelty that is unnecessary and hence retrograde.

Are these cases of the UF parties exercising insufficient control over their cadres? Often in the last few months it has appeared that the local units of the different parties were acting without much regard for what their leaders said at the level of the State United Front. Cynics may be inclined to suspect that this is all part of the unstated tactics of each party. But it is difficult to believe that the State-level leaders can be so irresponsible as to approve, if not to encourage, the senseless inter-party violence which can only weaken the Front and embolden its enemies. Yet none of the State-level efforts to consolidate working unity has had much effect on the attitudes and actions of unit-level workers. Even at the State level, there has been much mutual suspicion and bickering. From the charges and counter-charges, the conclusion seems irresistible that almost each party has been trying to extend its influence at the expense of the others, and few scruples have been observed over the means adopted.

An impression has also been created of a line-up of a few parties against the CPI(M). The CPI has been particularly active in mounting a campaign against the CPI(M)'s alleged misdeeds, but some other parties too seem uneasy about the predominance of the Front's leading partner. The criticism may or may not be justified, but even without go-

Of Mice And Man

A correspondent writes :

Years back it was difficult to be admitted to the membership of the Communist Party. One had to undergo a probationary period of hardship, study and work. Whether this system turned out profound Marxists is open to question in view of the melancholy waste of hopes overthrown, but the sincerity and honesty of cadres was exemplary.

Membership rules, as in the Congress, are not so strict now, it appears. The emphasis is on members, not on quality. If membership grows on a mass scale in a period of upheaval and severe repression, that is evidence of the maturity of the movement and the genuineness of militant, dedicated workers fighting for better things than the spoils of office, and a revolutionary elan is in the air. This example encourages people who are not in the party.

How many people joined the two communist parties during and in the wake of the turbulent food movement of 1966 when CPI(M) leaders in jail inspired admiration and allegiance? How many party activists were among the fifty or so killed? A spectacular rise in membership then would have been much more real and significant than the bandwagon membership of these UF days when people without any commitment are attracted to the ruling parties. It is true that there is an air of expectation among workers, and peasants in limited areas, and they are being drawn closer to the dominant party for economic gains—the recent Maidan rally of the CPI(M) was impressive, though the size of a rally is not everything, as Mrs Gandhi should note. But the trouble is the unthinking, shortsighted haste in which all kinds of people are being taken in as activists just to swell the ranks, including hooligans who overnight become local heroes. Former Congress agents are going over to the party which dominates their area and jotedars, big and small, are lining up in the same fashion. Though there is a stir in some areas of the

West Bengal countryside—a motion for the seizure of land—it must not be forgotten that it involves inter-party clashes and not, generally, encounters with the police and the kulaks.

There are too many cooks trying to prepare the socialist meal, growling at and fighting one another. At the top level, there was an air of understanding, which provided consolation to those whose guiding star is the United Front. But the clashes at the lower level have created distemper even among the leaders. At the uppermost level, the ideologues are busy sifting the bloody material in order to find out the class basis of the clashes. When groups of landless peasants and workers in unions kill their own men it would be idle to talk about class struggle and all that. It is hard to distinguish the pangs of abortion from those of the birth of a new order when the pillars of the old order are smug and safe. Their hangers-on too are happy raising prices all over.

The biggest parties in the UF

should have second thoughts about their membership drive. If party workers are not screened and something other than party organs provided for their training, the real enemies would be lost sight of despite repeated categorisation. The pity is, today's party organs are for the petty bourgeois and the pretty bourgeois are seldom capable of self-criticism and able to see beyond the noses of their leaders.

But, whatever the situation, there should be no defeatism. We all know and wish that the UF will continue, in our own image. The UF, despite the occasional apprehension of Mr Jyoti Basu, will survive even the calamity of a gherao of the Birlas. Of course there will be diversions, for instance, the row over the funeral procession of a 'dacoit'. Did those who are furious over the procession ever take to task the MLAs who ran away like rats at the sight of angry policemen? Or the authorities who did not care to respond to the 'dacoit's offer to surrender?

Field Day For 'Pharias'

The State Trading Corporation has given full-page advertisements in the newspapers to announce the list of its agents for the purchase of raw jute in nearly sixty centres in West Bengal; the names of agents in Bihar, Orissa and Assam too have been announced. These agents are supposed to buy whatever quantities of raw jute are offered for sale by the peasants at the minimum support prices stipulated for the different grades and qualities of the fibre.

A scanning of the list is most revealing. There is a sprinkling of co-operative societies among the agents named by the STC, but a fair chunk consists of private dealers—*pharias* and *aratdars*—who have been there for long, long years in the jute trade. Scratch even the cooperative societies, and perhaps the bulk of them too are under the thumb of private dealers. Under the kind of arrangement formalised by the STC, all that is therefore ensured is that the agents, when

they turn over supplies of the fibre to the Corporation, will receive the stipulated minimum support prices tapped up by the usual agency commission; but what the agents in their turn will actually pay to the producers is anybody's guess. If past experience is any guide, given the size of this year's crop, the purchases by the agents—who are more often than not hand-in-glove with the mills—will be at prices way below the minimum support levels; whatever supplies the mills would need would be handed over to them at mutually agreed prices, and the rest would be dumped on the STC; the difference between the minimum support prices—which the STC would pay out—and the prices with which the fibre would be actually bought from the farmers would be pocketed by the *pharias*.

Nothing could make more obvious the utter absurdity of the Union Government's much-vaunted price support operations. Price support is

supposed to protect the producers from the depredations of the *pharias* and the *aratdars*, but the task of protection is being delegated to these very specimens. In the process, the Government would be cheated, the farmers would be cheated, and public funds allotted by the STC would be used to shore up agents and dealers whose liquidation should have been the objective of State policy.

Everybody knows how this business of price support works out in actuality, everybody including the Union Government and the State Governments. The United Front Government, West Bengal, till only a few weeks ago were raising loud protests against New Delhi's fixing the minimum support price for the Assam Bottoms variety of raw jute at Rs. 40 per maund in Calcutta, and was demanding a price of Rs. 50 per maund instead. There is little point in making these empty noises, since the State Government is incapable of offering effective support to the producers even at the level of Rs. 40 per maund. Whatever support is being accorded is being accorded to the agents, who have been promised a minimum rake-off. The STC's exhortation to the producer's not to sell at prices lower than the minimum support levels is neither here nor there: no legal means exist by which the STC could enforce these minimum prices, nor are any administrative devices available for checking whether the dealers do in fact pay the poor farmers the stipulated prices.

To make matters worse, the mills are back at their nefarious game. Now that the crop is excellent and prices are coming down, they have refused to lift the purchase quota set for them by the Jute Commissioner. If the mills keep away from buying, prices will be even more depressed and their agents—who are the agents of the STC as well—can then purchase the fibre at cut rates, to the benefit of both themselves and the mills. Apart from having some perfunctory discussions with the President of the Indian Jute Mills Association, the Union Government does not seem to have stirred itself even minimally to protect the producers. The Jute Commissioner, if he too

wants, can apply penal measures to force the mills to buy up to the limit of the quota assigned to them; that no such measures are being contemplated only betrays the class bias of the authorities: why bother about the plight of the small farmers and share

croppers in the eastern parts of the country? As long as the Birlas and the Goenkas thrive, the poor cultivators are dispensable. It would almost seem that the leftist government in West Bengal holds about the same views.

View from Delhi

Browbeatnikism

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

AS clubs go the Press Club of India is not much of a place. It is little more than a pub and trifle better than a talking shop. During the 45-day political crisis it was the clearing house of wretched gossip purveyed by the liveried corps of kitchen correspondents to secure the right slant on news. When the silly season overtook us all, the Press Club came in handy on two days in a lean weak. It could contrive two occasions which provided solid copy. One was the one-hour question and answer encounter with the Prime Minister who has not held a formal Press conference since January 1. The other was the debate among the editors on the freedom of the Press, obviously designed to give Mr Inder Gujral, a rising star in the Prime Minister's firmament, a chance to deny that he was playing the Little Goebels for the Government.

The Prime Minister's reluctant bout with the correspondents turned out to be a depressing affair, not entirely because the level of questions directed at her was poor. The first six questions were serious and straight, meant to probe the leader's mind on matters of policy or Congress organisation. But Mrs Gandhi dismissed them with monosyllabic answers or with what Prof Parkinson would have called browbeatnikism. Thereupon the questions were hostile, flippant or loaded. Yet the Press conference revealed a good deal.

The question on Mr Jagjivan Ram's income-tax returns caught the new Finance Minister fumbling for words and when she suggested that

the 10-year lapse could be the result of forgetfulness and nothing more, there was booing and heckling the like of which she might not have experienced even in the Congress Parliamentary Party. She tried to insinuate that it was Mr Morarji Desai's fault not to have sent out reminders to Mr Jagjivan Ram but there was a mischievous smile when she admitted that Mr Jagjivan Ram was at fault.

Mr Jagjivan Ram is one of the numerous enigmas in Mrs Gandhi's politicking. At the moment he is a contender for the Deputy Prime Ministership because he was one of her two hatchet men in the war against the Syndicate. He has been in the Central Cabinet since 1946 except for the short exile imposed on him by the vicious Kamaraj Plan. Here is the leader of the Harijan lobby who in over 20 years as a Minister has not made a single statement on domestic or foreign policy issues and has kept all the factions guessing about his position in the power game. Though Mrs Gandhi fumbled for words while answering the question it could well be that she liked the question because it gave her a chance to put Babuji on the defensive so that she could ward off his demand for elevation as the Deputy Prime Minister. The SSP is thinking of a censure motion in the winter session of Parliament over Mr Jagjivan Ram's income-tax returns and that would provide Mrs Gandhi a good alibi for not making him a Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr Y. B. Chavan is another aspirant for Deputy Prime Minister who

was in the news last week. The Chavan group and the minuscule Tul-sidas Jadhav group in the MPCC were competing with each other in proclaiming their loyalty to the Prime Minister. Mr Chavan said all that happened after the Bangalore AICC could have been avoided if the Congress candidate for Presidentship had not been chosen by vote. But he justified his own vote in favour of Mr Sanjiva Reddy. Mr Chavan's break with the Syndicate is now complete and he has to be content to be left with his Home portfolio.

The multiplicity of Mrs Gandhi's political standards was underlined by her assertion that there was no question of free vote on policy issues. It was indeed an exercise in sophistry and a questioner nearly ambushed her. "You said Mr Giri's victory is people's victory... You said the people are with the Congress... The Congress candidate was defeated in the Presidential election... How do you reconcile all this?" That was the essence of the question but Mrs Gandhi managed to browbeat the correspondent with a flat assertion that she never said Mr Giri's victory was people's victory.

Mrs Gandhi's attempts to come to a new adjustment with the left parties has struck observers here. During her Calcutta visit, she refrained from any attacks on the leftists or the communists or the United Front in general. But the reports received by the Union Home Ministry speak of a deterioration in the law and order situation in West Bengal. Another intriguing aspect of West Bengal politics as seen from New Delhi is the new role of Mr Siddharta San-kar Ray. According to the Prime Minister's supporters, his equation with the Marwari big business of

Calcutta is the same as that of the Prime Minister with the Marwari big business in general. If the Syndicate's mainstay is the Parsi and Gujarati finance capital, the polarisation on the other side is also complete. It is Marwari finance capital. Anti-communism is at a discount even inside the Swatantra Party because the young Marwari MPs with business stakes in Calcutta would like the party to give up its rigid stance so that they can buy their peace with the United Front Government. No wonder Mr Jyoti Basu is on the right side of all the important Central Ministers except Mr Y. B. Chavan. From the Swatantra Party to the CPI(M) every party wants to ensure the survival of Mrs Gandhi as the Prime Minister. Ironically, the main drive for the election petition against Mr V. V. Giri came from the Syndicate-supporting Congress MPs and not from any of the rightist parties. The Prime Minister's camp hit back against the election petition with a renewed campaign to oust Mr Nijalingappa. But the fact is, neither Mrs Gandhi nor the Syndicate wants a confrontation immediately. The thing to watch is still the Congress party elections due to be completed by the end of 1970.

Press Freedom

The Press Club discussion on freedom of the Press was wholly out of focus. The stifling monopoly hold on the Press was not the issue in question because it has always been there. What occasioned the debate was the alleged tendency on the part of the Government to interfere with the Press in its attempt to bring about a moron-like conformism. The new intolerance was the issue. The Press is taking a bad buffeting between the two. The editors of the big business Press would not like to admit the existence of any threat from monopolies while the spokesmen of the communist Press would not countenance any charge of governmental interference. So the twain never met and the real issue was lost.

Mr Inder Gujral's sudden awakening to the evils of monopoly control of the Press was in the least amusing because it comes when the mono-

polists are lining themselves up behind the Government one after the other. The line of a certain Marwari newspaper changed overnight during the recent political crisis. The fact is some of the big business houses are not above board in their dealings and the Government can always use subtle methods to bully them into supporting certain policies. As long as the monopoly Press was wholly with the Government and the leadership in power, the leaders did not find the need to talk about the evils of monopoly. If the bogey of Government interference with the Press was a phenomenon of the post bank nationalisation era, the Government's concern over the monopolist danger to a free Press is also a phenomenon of the same era. In the past, the monopolist Press had obliged some of the leaders by sacking journalists who had taken positions against the interests of these leaders. It was because the monopolists were so vulnerable in the face of the Government's pressure tactics and had to go to these leaders for other favours.

Much of the glib talk related to the mythical freedom of the editor. But the editor of a big business paper overnight became its general manager which is proof that the two positions are interchangeable and it is no longer the age of editors but of managers who think the paper sells because of the ads and everything else in the paper is for filling the white space between ads. And editorial freedom does not mean the freedom of the editor alone. The internal freedom in a newspaper is as important as its external freedom.

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SEPTEMBER 27, 1969

Another Ministry ?

RAMJI

THE Right CPI in Kerala has become superlatively right. The latest transformation of its political ideology permits a link-up with the Prades Congress and the Kerala Congress. At the time of writing (September 19) the shape of the next Ministry in Kerala has become more or less clear. It is going to be led by either the Muslim League or the CPI and will have the support of the Prades Congress and the breakaway Kerala Congress.

The Muslim League has been busy, at the behest of the CPI which is running the 'mini-front' within the UF, establishing firm lines of communication between the front and the Congress and the Kerala Congress. A few days back, the top leader of the Kerala Congress was a guest of Mr Bafqui Thangal, acknowledged top leader of the Muslim League in Kerala and well known for his great affluence as landlord and businessman, at his residence in Calicut. It is learnt that the Kerala Congress, which is the local version of the Swatantra party in ideological essence and spirit and style of approach, has agreed to extend full support to the proposed anti-Marxist Ministry and if conditions are suitable, the Kerala Congress may even join the Government. Mr Thangal had secret meetings with the top brass of the Kerala Prades Congress also. While this party is not in a position to join the front formally, it has, it is reliably learnt, promised full and unconditional support to the proposed Ministry.

The Assembly meets on September 29 and the showdown is likely to be on the basis of a resolution by a Congress member asking for enquiry against the KTP Minister, Mr Willingdon, and Mr Willingdon alone. This is likely to be resisted by the Marxists, whose stand is that an enquiry should be conducted into the affairs of all the Ministers accused of

corruption. The resolution is likely to be pushed through in spite of the Marxists, which would indirectly be a gesture of no-confidence against the Government. If this does not provoke resignation of the present Cabinet, the mini-front is likely to come up with a straight no-confidence motion.

The attempt to ditch the Marxists as reactionaries and corrupt elements to boot, is likely to boomerang on the mini-fronters if mass reaction is an index.

The Marxists have been organising public opinion : they have taken the entire issue to the masses. And the mass upsurge in their favour in all the nine district towns of Kerala has been impressive. Mighty jathas and mightier rallies have been staged at every important centre in response to the call of the Marxist party. This has amply proved that in spite of its commissions and omissions, the Marxist party still commands the biggest following for any single party in Kerala. But the CPI, ensconced in its characteristic ivory tower euphoria, still believes in petty intrigues and comfortable assumptions that power would be a lever to garner popular support. Or, maybe, the CPI, which by itself could not win more than three seats in Kerala, feels that this is the last chance for it to stay in power at any cost, including ideology.

The Marxists have made impressive headway among a new section of the people : the agricultural workers of the granaries of Kerala, Palghat and Kuttanad. It was only very recently that the Marxists attempted to penetrate this much exploited and comparatively ignorant and illiterate section. It is true that in Palghat, the Marxists had their traditional stronghold. But the middle class

farmer was their sheet anchor in this area. And these farmers, using their influence, swung the votes of the agricultural workers in favour of the Marxists. Now the position has changed. The Marxist party has established direct lines of communication with the agricultural workers in a very comprehensive manner and this is going to tell later, in trials of strength against the other parties.

In a way, it could be said that the tactics of the CPI and co. are a blessing in disguise for the Marxists. It gives them an opportunity to establish their progressive credentials before the masses and ultimately, it could provide an opportunity to assume power and administer according to their ideology and electoral assurances. The polarisation in Kerala, with the Marxists on one side and the anti-Marxists on the other, is proceeding apace and this is to be welcomed in a State where a multiplicity of parties has made the administration characterless and ineffective.

প্রকাশিত হলঃ—

নিশানা

দ্বিতীয় সংখ্যা

লগুনের চাষনা পলিসি স্টাডি গুপ্তের
অনুমতিক্রমে ভ্রতশীট

এশিল (৬২) সংখ্যার পূর্ণাঙ্গ অর্থবাদ

এতে আছে :

চীন—সোভিয়েত সীমান্ত সংঘর্ষ

প্রথম সংখ্যা এখনও পাওয়া যাচ্ছে

দাম : ৩৫ পঃ

এতে আছে :

শান্তিপূর্ণ উত্তরণ না জনযুক্ত ?

দাম : ৪৫ পঃ

আরও পড়ুন :

কমিউনিস্ট প্যানিফেস্টোর শিক্ষা
(লেনিন, স্টালিন ও মাও-এর ব্যাখ্যাসহ)
—বিজন সেন দাম : ১০ পঃ

ছাপা হবে :

চীনের চলমান বিপ্লব—হিন্টন

নিউ বুক সেন্টার

১৯৫-১বি, বিধান সরণি, কলিকাতা-৬

Has Liberalism A Future In India ?

SCRIBE

NOW the conscientious liberal of whom I was speaking cannot possibly subscribe to this negative secularism either. He sees clearly that, at its best, it stands for an even-handed tolerance of both religions in the fullness of their homicidal enthusiasm, and, at its worst, for a sneaking solicitude for one. To salve his own political conscience, therefore, he begins to affect a domestically anti-religious stand. Our country is admittedly a land of paradoxes, but even here, there is no sight more paradoxical than the contrast presented by the berserker religiosity of the masses, flourishing cheek by jowl with the absolute indifference to anything religious, paraded by the so-called progressive-minded people amongst us. In the conscientious liberal this indifference, which should more appropriately be called antipathy, is even more pronounced than in the Marxist. Now the interesting thing is that our friend the conscientious liberal does not seem to realise in what an embarrassing proximity this antipathy places him to his arch-enemy, the dialectical materialist. Only he can offer no philosophic exposition of his materialism as the latter can and very frequently does with ponderous eloquence. The worst of it is that the conscientious liberal cannot affect rationalistic scepticism in the eighteenth century manner, knowing fully well that his belief in reason is not passionate enough to induce him to offer it as a healthier substitute for the religious outlook. Thus in practice his opposition to religion degenerates into a sort of vulgar materialism which is certainly a poorer expedient than the dialectical variety.

Let this be clearly understood. The vogue of liberalism even in India has at least a century's history behind it. But what distinguishes most conspicuously the liberal of our own time from his nineteenth-century counterpart is the latter's profound commitment to the search for a better religion,

contrasting strangely with the former's essentially unphilosophic indifference to any. Behind this indifference looms no catastrophe of consciences startled out of their conventional religiosity into the fierce unconventionality of desperate godlessness. Nor does it have its origin in the intellectual Prometheanism born of the sanguinary experiences of 1947, and of what followed as a sequel. The facts are more prosaic than that. The atheism affected by our liberals is really a vulgar imitation of the Western article, itself the debased remnant of the radiant disbelief of the Enlightenment. Our liberals pride themselves on their ability to look beyond the sort of life whose only claim to excellence is an egalitarian distribution of bread and butter. They boast of their allegiance to things of the mind and the spirit. But exactly how much, one may ask, of mind and spirit is there in believing that the 'consumer goods materialism' of the socialistic pattern is a distinct improvement on the dialectical in passively allowing the State to perpetrate the most monstrous defilement of the body of education by turning it into a manufacturing machine of thousands of BAs and MAs from a material which has not even been properly leavened by a right assimilation of the three R's or, to take an instance nearer home, in duly paying one's contribution to the Durga Puja fund set up by the most sex-hungry gang of youthful rotters of one's locality, with the specific intention to avoid unpleasant consequences for one's own family and then protesting that one did not really intend to lend any countenance to the cult of the many-handed goddess?

Thus our friend the conscientious liberal has really no justification for complacency over his brand of non-dialectical atheism. For the matter of that—confining ourselves, for the moment, to this business of the Durga Puja contributions—our friend the Marxist, on his part, should do well

to ask his own conscience if it is wholly unclouded on this point. Let no one begin to think I am getting unnecessarily wordy on a trivial issue. I readily acknowledge the insignificance of the matter. But have we not been repeatedly assured by our moralists that insignificant failings of character very often prove to be the surest trail-blazers of the final abyss of pre-destined damnation? However let me not get unduly excited over the pecadillos of our friend the Marxist right at this moment. Our more immediate concern was with the conscientious liberal. As I see it, there are only two courses open to him: one is, of course, to repudiate all religions for whatever they are worth, and do so in a thoroughgoing, positive, determined manner. His idealism for the cause of freedom of conscience has been put to the test of cold analysis revealing what it has come to mean in modern India. It has come to mean freedom of the homicidal conscience and nothing else. The conscientious liberal recognises this, even if the tender-hearted Nehruite does not. This latter, of course, is an idealist on a more idyllic plane, exuding a measure of innocence and naivete that has to be seen to be believed possible. He, poor man, is so fragile and airy a thing that none but a thorough sadist could begrudge him his peaceful hours devoted to the amiable cult of the 'gentle colossus'. I readily leave him to his amiable labours, and, returning to our tougher friend the conscientious liberal, adduce this very fact of his toughness as a proof of his recognition of the true meaning of freedom of conscience in Indian conditions. Indeed, the conscientious liberal is the most disillusioned man in modern India. But his position becomes absurd simply by reason of his inability to pursue that disillusion to its logical conclusion: in other words, to sink his differences with the Marxist and join forces with him in abolishing all the religions current in India. I am sorry to say that far from the conscientious liberal joining forces with the Marxist in this business, not even the latter has thought fit to begin his struggle for the suppression of religions. He, I sup-

pose, is biding his time and only occasionally muttering to himself, 'I shall hold my breath for some years yet. But when the Revolution begins, I shall make those blasted religion-mongers understand what it means, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, to pursue religion. I shall tear them limb from limb but not just yet. Meanwhile I shall clamour for the abolition of private enterprise, unequal wages and the like, but, as for the abolition of religions, I shall put this business off for a more convenient occasion. Who knows but that I may even end by antagonising the proletariat if I raise the clamour right now? You know what proletarians in India are. A most crazy, undependable lot. One can never be sure how far they are ready to go yet. But, surely, one cannot afford to run any risk. Discretion, as has been well said, is the better part of valour; and the great thing now is to be discreet, wary and supple'. After this, it is certainly invidious to single out the conscientious liberal for exclusive condemnation on the score of intellectual pusillanimity.

Alternative

The alternative I have in mind is one to which the freethinker can readily assent, but not the Marxist, though I have some hope that it may not appear wholly unacceptable to the conscientious liberal. But here I am faced with a difficulty. The Indian freethinker is a much rarer bird than the conscientious liberal, the tender-hearted Nehruite, the insurrectionary Marxist, not to mention the sleek and oily apologist of the status quo. The conscientious liberal indeed sometimes poses for being one. But he remains a Westernising liberal to his marrow even when administering what, to his thinking, is the most original reproach ever brought against things Indian. No more than elementary intelligence is required to see that his fury against cow, caste and the 'kaupin' follows the conventional liberal pattern, a pattern become as orthodox today as Western philosophic thought was, previous to the Renaissance. To call such a person a freethinker is surely to denude the term of any vitality. I am, there-

fore, prevented from holding up any amongst the Indian preachers of progressive thought as a true freethinker, and am reduced to the unhappy expedient of giving my own views, such as they are, as a specimen of freethinking on religious matters.

A freethinker, or, at all events, a freethinker of my stamp, does not view the prospect of doing without any religion with anything approaching the cheerful unconcern I have seemed to assume so long in the course of the article. Certainly, I would sooner there had been no religion in India than that there were so many with so much hatred and potential slaughterousness, making the air toxic with their baleful contagion. Yet to me it seems no better than a counsel of desperation. A far happier resolution of India's religious problem, to my mind, would be to instil into all of them a spirit of reformation, of which the guiding impulse must be the acceptance of a principle of inter-religious harmony as the first article of their "secular" creed; but, in any case, their theological core must be left intact.

No religion can properly be said to have a secular part. But, in any case, it is not difficult to see how much of it is essentially concerned with the 'unknown' and how much only incidentally so. No religion can possibly trifle with the first without seriously imperilling its identity. But it is not unreasonable to believe that it can make room for some modification in the second. My own suggestion, of course, goes far beyond a mere modification, it proposes nothing short of a revolution in the second by urging each religion to renounce its autonomy and advance half way to communicate with the others.

Now if such a spirit of reformation could be instilled into all the existing world-religions, the result would be one of incalculable beneficence. Religion, being disinfected now of its murderous toxin, would shine out as the greatest bond connecting disparate communities. But, obviously, such a reformation could not be confined to India, if only because her own religions are not confined there. Necessarily, its field of operation has to be

worldwide. The question is : is there any possibility of such a reformation taking place in some foreseeable future?

I have been reckoning without my host ; in other words, I have been reckoning without the masses of India. There is one very simple reason why the masses of India can never accept the sort of Erastianism I have proposed in the first part of this article and the 'abolitionism' and (reformationism' I have proposed in the later parts. They cannot accept them simply because these are matters beyond their comprehension. Liberal reforms depend, for their acceptance, on appeals to reason, and incomprehension is a state of mind against which there can be no appeal. Why our masses are victims of such prodigious incomprehension in respect of proposals for religious reform is a long story. I cannot tell the story here, but I shall bring home to the reader the magnitude of this incomprehension by citing two historical examples—1857 and 1947. Both these events have to be explained by the same agent of causality operating behind them: the fear of a new social order which was supposed to intend meddling with the religion of our masses. And the prodigiousness of the contrast presented by these sanguinary events to the mummified passivity of these same masses when faced with the prospect of starvation on a national scale, as in the 'aeon-breaking' fifties (by the reckoning of the Bengali calendar), gives us little ground to hope that any considerable religious reform can be effected in India except by the methods of 'enlightened authoritarianism'. Short of revolution, this is the only mode of political action public-spirited Indians may be asked to contemplate and decide upon. Revolution, alas ! is a consummation which many amongst us devoutly wish for, but which few perhaps are destined to celebrate in their lifetime. The air around us has indeed begun to throb with the stirrings of a new spirit, but let no one mistake it for the spirit of revolution. It is the spirit of anarchy casting the portentous shadow over all the aspects of civilised existence in modern India. While the