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CHANDIGARH CHALK CIRCLE

BY the time these lines appear in print, Mrs Gandhi might have announced her 'decision' over Chandigarh. But, even so, the chances are that her new announcement would merely add a further chapter to the saga of indecisiveness which has been the major feature of her policy with respect to the administrative feature of Corbusier's handiwork. At the moment, her predicament is even slightly worse. The Akalis may have a legitimate claim on Chandigarh, even though the dying of Pheruman—despite its not-altogether unquiet dignity—has been neither here nor there so far as the furtherance of the claim is concerned. It also seems fairly clear that Sant Fateh Singh's various pseudo-friends within the Akali party would have nothing but alacrity in their heart when February 1 arrives and the funeral pyre is set afire. On the other hand, the pyrotechnics of Haryana's proponents too are scarcely any less repulsive.

No sympathies need be wasted on those who use the game of politics to push themselves into impossible corners. If the Sant is now for burning, it is the call of retribution on demagogy; if the miserable lot who constitute the Haryana establishment are denied their wild pleasures, then too, there should be no cause for disappointment. On this particular issue, neither of the parties can claim to be the good woman of Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

What has however made the whole thing messier is Mrs Gandhi's own vulnerability. It is not only the two disputants who have played themselves into an impossible corner, but the person sitting on judgment too. And the judge might indeed end up by slashing the child into two. Mrs Gandhi knows that she could only decide once, and that the policy of safety is to keep that decision pending. Every little point of policy, during these precarious days, has to be tested against its possible repercussion on the division of votes in the Lok Sabha, or on the prospects of the Prime Minister in a mid-term poll. Having promised manna, during private parleys, to the Akalis as well as to the Lalas, and needing the support of both Mrs Gandhi is now welcome to stew in her own juice: the concoction in this case being two-thirds opportunism and one-third timidity.

A referendum of the people of Chandigarh could have been an

appropriate way out, or maybe not so appropriate. But more relevant is the Prime Minister's patent inability even to entertain seemingly rational solutions. And it is a reflection on the quality of the season that such a huge expenditure of time and passion is being earmarked on such a peripheral issue. Take the ordinary men and women of Punjab and Haryana; it matters nothing, absolutely nothing, to them whether the real estate of Chandigarh comes un-

der the jurisdiction of Sardar Gurnam Singh or Shri Bansi Lal; the rate of exploitation of the poor peasants and workers in Chandigarh, or elsewhere, will not be any less whatever the decision; the rate of economic growth will not be hastened one bit; corruption and skulduggery will not abate by one minuscule degree. Irrespective of the Prime Minister's decision or indecision, the polity that is India will continue to remain a decaying cadaver.

from the Ministry is being built up steadily. The CPI clamour over the alleged plot to form a Ministry under Mr Jyoti Basu's leadership with the help of Bangla Congress dissidents is louder than that of the Bangla Congress itself. The decision to break the UF has been made; the latest developments in Kerala will reinforce it, for it is evident now that the so-called unwanted support of the two wings of the Congress to any venture for a non-CPM ministry is assured. Of course, the CPM wants to be in the Government as long as it can, for to it the alternative appears to be political wilderness. A section of the party has developed a vested interest in office and can no longer think of building up the party the hard way. A move is afoot to make a fictional differentiation between the UF and its Government so that the quarrels of the Front may not be raised in the Cabinet. The unanimous adoption by the Cabinet of the Governor's inaugural address to the budget session of the State Assembly shows to what length such hypocrisy can be carried. There should be no illusion that the Government can be saved by such notional safeguards. Mr Basu may send any number of protest notes to the Chief Minister and alternate them with admission of inadvertence on a massive scale, but that will not resolve the problem. The CPM has to make up its mind as to whether it will remain in the Ministry on the Chief Minister's terms, which, for all one knows, are being prompted by someone else.

The Broken Tryst

It is amazing that ten months in office should have sapped so much of the ingenuity of the UF leaders that they could not think up a more convincing reason for abandoning the much-publicised meeting of the UF committee last week than a "misunderstanding" over the venue. The offices of the CPI and the Lok Sevak Sangh, in which the leaders of the 14 UF parties had gathered, are only about two kilometres apart, and if the leaders really wanted to discuss the crisis, the two groups could unite in either of these places in half the time they waited for the other to arrive. Both the groups had a fair sprinkling of Ministers; at least ten Ministers were present in full regalia, and their cars could transport the UF leaders to an agreed venue. Telephones were at hand, and the two groups were in communication constantly, though not over how the meeting could be held and where. After the meeting had been abandoned, Mr Biswanath Mukherjee of the CPI went over to the LSS office to taste the "seasonal delicacies" that the host there had planned to serve the leaders wrestling with the problem of saving the Front. Apparently, the will to resolve the deadlock was weaker than the desire to savour a tasty dish.

The childish hoax that the UF leaders sought to play on the people is, however, not entirely without political undertones. The way the parties had grouped together at the two

places suggested a method, the incipience of a split in the middle of the UF. The Bangla Congress, the CPI, and the Forward Bloc were in the CPI office, while the CPM and the RSP were in the LSS office. It would seem that some of the smaller parties have not yet been able to make up their minds about the star to which they should hitch their wagons, and they sent representatives to both the places. In strict impartiality the two joint conveners of the Front distributed themselves between the two offices, and at the end they blamed each other for the phoney-looking confusion. The episode appeared to be a dress rehearsal for bigger things to come, either side hoping that its show of strength will not be lost on the other. If things do not go awry, the UF committee will have held its agendaless meeting by the time this piece appears; but it is quite on the cards that should the situation hot up, another confusion may conveniently arise necessitating further postponement of the proposed discussion; and the leaders may disperse after a more sumptuous feasting for their trouble to attend a non-meeting.

Such pranks cannot conceal the reluctance of the UF parties to face the problem squarely; nor can the final denouement be thus avoided. Mr Ajoy Mukherjee is not moving on his own; he has powerful supporters, all of them not necessarily within the State. A case for dropping the CPM

Decontrol In Tamil Nadu

The DMK Government in Tamil Nadu has abolished statutory rationing in Madras and Coimbatore, at a time when even the ruling Congress has been raising the slogan of nationalisation of the food trade. Apparently the DMK has outlived the necessity of such a socialist slogan. It has had enough of its election pledge of 'one rupee a measure'. Without money from the Centre

which flatly refused to foot the bill, the DMK found it impossible to extend the election pledge beyond the two industrial cities. Carrying on with the generosity, which caused a heavy drain on the state coffer, even within the twin cities, was also becoming irksome and no wonder, at the first opportunity the DMK has got rid of the burden of rationing. It is, it can of course point out happily, concerned with the poor people; has it not retained the 'one rupee a measure' scheme for families earning less than Rs 200 a month? An outsider may think that people living outside the two cities must be getting rice at similar cheap prices and therefore the DMK Government is less concerned with them. The matter of the fact is, rice sells now in the cheapest days of the year, which has been moreover officially called a bumper one, at higher prices in even bumper areas like Tiruchi.

The traders and millers, for whose benefit the decontrol was decided upon, will be celebrating their Pongol festival in a happy mood. Not only the decision; even its timing has been just right—the harvest has left the hands of small producers. Now the millers and traders can hoard the stock which they obtained from the peasants at easiest prices and wait for the right time to market the product. They have welcomed the Government's step as the boldest ever.

Mr Karunanidhi announced the decontrol decision without bothering to inform the Centre, not to talk of getting its consent. Control was, if he cares to remember, introduced as part of a national food policy to have rationing in all big cities of the country. It seems that the DMK Government can feed the Tamil Nadu people by its own food strength, unlike deficit States like West Bengal which lean heavily on the bounty of the Centre. If all the surplus States take the cue from Tamil Nadu, the less lucky States will have to think of fending for themselves—no matter even if the rice-surplus but industrially-deficit States draw heavily on the Central exchequer for their indus-

trialisation. Who cares, in these chaotic days, for noble sentiments like national integration? Even then the bold Mr Karunanidhi would do well to hark back to not so remote days. Last year, when a drought affected a small part of Tamil Nadu the DMK Government cried for mercy and, pleading starvation of thousands of people, extorted a heavy appropriation of wheat from the Central stock.

Its record last year was clear enough to show that the DMK has not that control over its food position that it can take such a bold step as decontrol of food grains just because the harvest this year has been

good. It has of course stated that its stock is comfortable now, without committing itself on the exact volume of the stock. But one of its spokesmen has been on record that procurement of foodgrains this year has been less than twenty percent. Even if one is led to believe that the current year's crop report is substantially correct, the DMK Government is indeed over-bold in its hope that a good harvest automatically brings about an equitable distribution of foodgrains at economic prices. But the DMK has tremendous faith in its administrators; it even thinks that they can count those families in Madras and Coimbatore whose monthly income is Rs 200 or less.

Informal Gang-Up

With centenary celebrations, festivals and colourful socialist jamborees, New Delhi is perhaps the most swinging capital in South Asia. And nobody should mind if General Ne Win, the Chairman of Burma's Revolutionary Council, chooses to take a week off from his own drab capital to holiday in ours. That the Government would take pains to impress upon people the 'informal' nature of the visit is therefore only too natural. But as one of the vanguard of what *Pravda* loves to call the "non-capitalist path" it is natural for General Ne Win to take a lot of interest in Mrs Indira Gandhi. A fellow socialist, she has just nationalised some banks and has quite a few things to learn from the General who has nationalised every bit of business in Burma, including cinema halls, and in the process has made the black market a national institution.

All this is fine, but there are minor misgivings. It is not clear why a holidaying Premier's party should include such people as the Director of Military Intelligence. Neither is it clear why such loaded issues like the "use of one State by nationals or organizations of another State as a base for hostile activities against their home State or against a third

State" should figure so prominently in the 'informal' talks. It would also be noticed that immediately before General Ne Win left Rangoon India sent a new ambassador to Burma who, as the Commissioner of Manipur, has some experience of 'pacifying' restive tribes. There is, one may suspect, more to the informal talks than meets the eye. No joint communique is to be issued, because the talks are informal.

This hush-hush informality as well as the 'security' bias in the discussions fall in their proper places if one views Ne Win not as a holidaying premier but as the head of an embattled government. That his success in liquidating Thakin Than Tun, the Chairman of the Burmese Communist Party, did not mean, as claimed by Rangoon, the beginning of the end of the guerilla war has been clearly demonstrated by events since August last. About a week before General Ne Win left for New Delhi his army lost 26 men in three successive ambushes in 48 hours. Shan and Kachin rebels continue to control a large part of north Burma. Moreover, the Northeast Command, a multi-racial force led by Naw Seng, has been giving the Burmese army a hell of a time. Ac-

According to recent reports some Burmese Nagas have formed an Eastern Naga Revolutionary Council which is in contact with both the Kachins and the Naga underground in India. Both General Ne Win and Mrs Gandhi cannot be alarmed at the growing solidarity between the rebels across the frontier. The brave claims of breaking the backbone of the Naga underground notwithstanding, Mrs Gandhi must not have

failed to notice that on August 14 last year the whole of Nagaland came to a standstill as the day was declared a "holiday" by the Naga underground. Strategic hamlets, New Delhi has discovered by this time, are not enough to curb the rebels. What is needed is joint patrol by the Indian and the Burmese army and if necessary joint "search and destroy operations", as along the Thailand-Malaysia border.

which functioned with scant regard for the Central Government in Lagos.

The internal situation in Nigeria is such that the military victory is no guarantee of one Nigeria or the end of hostilities. To prepare the ground for reconciliation, repression of the emaciated Biafrans has to end. The rehabilitation programme should include restoration of all former rights, including property, to the Ibos. General Gowon should well remember that it is too expensive a proposition to keep one quarter of the population under constant surveillance.

The Surrender

A dream called Biafra, which is not merely an Iboland since other minority tribes of the East were there to escape the spite of the northerners, has not come true. General Gowon's tactics of continuing the siege and starving millions in Biafra until the resistance crumbled has paid off. The large-scale indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilian areas with Ilyushins and MIGs while making heavy armoured attacks on a wide front with Saladins and Ferrets enabled the federal forces to cut the Biafran enclave in half. From the end of November the Biafran troops were not able to feed themselves. It was something of a miracle that a hastily-built nation of fourteen million, subsequently reduced to eight million or so through death and loss of territory, formed around the nucleus of one tribe, the Ibo, could fight for its self-determination against overwhelming odds for so long. In every respect, from population and economic strength to Big Power support and arms supply, Biafra was no match for Lagos. But what sustained it through three years of blockade was the Ibos' spirit of unity, self-help, discipline and adaptability. An etiology of Biafran surrender will show that General Ojukwu, in spite of his acuity in managing public relations, could not secure sufficient arms to equip the troops on fighting fronts when the federal army was cranking up offensives from the north-east, south-east and west. From the middle of 1969, France refused fur-

ther arms supply to Biafra—a result of the federal bait that French oil interests would be secured in the united Nigeria. Of late, Russia had been mounting pressure on Gowon for a quick military solution of the Biafran issue. A negotiated settlement would have meant the return of Calabar to Biafra, the shore facilities of which were given to Russia in return for arms aid. Apart from Tanzania and Zambia, the OAU member States were with Lagos. On the other hand, short of recognition, China had hailed the heroic Biafran struggle as a fight against imperialism and feudalism.

The physical composition of Nigeria shows how colonies were created in Africa according to power equations and convenience of the West. The Eastern region was taken into Nigeria in 1912 to forestall German and French competition. Instances can be multiplied where consideration of natural ethnic division was sacrificed for safeguarding the commercial interests of the Western powers. Naturally, the OAU or the West cannot be expected to entertain the idea of rearranging those African States which are not viable units. The protagonists of a Nigerian federation advance the theory that the gathering together of leaders was a salient characteristic of the State's creation. But inter-regional alliances were like dynastic deals between representatives of the leading tribes. As a result, before the January 1966 coup there emerged four small empires

American Wives

A correspondent writes from New Delhi :

The four American wives who were in New Delhi last week on their tear-jerking mission to seek Mrs Indira Gandhi's intervention with Hanoi to know the whereabouts of their missing husbands got the good Press they expected. Funny how each one was photogenic and there was even a pretty Negro (Black people fighting for liberty in the United States are no longer called Negroes!)—to complete the traditional United States public relations gimmick.

The hardened cynic might be pardoned for asking why the mission was sent to Moscow, Bucharest and New Delhi and wherever. These are surely not the first young wives to be kept guessing about the fate of their husbands who went to Vietnam. And why go to Moscow, New Delhi or even Hanoi? Surely it is the responsibility of the United States army in Vietnam to keep a check on these matters. The whole episode smacks of a crude State Department manoeuvre. Even the invitation for the Press conference at the American-free style Intercontinental Hotel came from the United States Embassy here.

The cold war implications are obvious and the timing sinister—in the context of reports that New Delhi may move to upgrade its mis-

sion in Hanoi. It also has a slightly desperate air about it. If the United States Government has to resort now to sending pathetic young wives and mothers to win in-

ternational support against those dreadful, callous, inhuman North Vietnamese its morale must be at a low ebb indeed. The manoeuvre is both maudlin and cheap.

two days that follow are holidays and the budget has to be presented on February 28, Saturday. The date for the inauguration of the budget session was shifted from February 16 to February 20 because the outcome of the trial of strength in Uttar Pradesh might not be known by February 16. The Governor inaugurates the State Legislature session on February 11 and the voting on the thanks motion on the address would not have taken place on February 16. And besides, the political grapevine asserts that February 20 is the most auspicious day for the Prime Minister, though another auspicious day—January 13—passed off without even a Cabinet reshuffle.

View from Delhi

Managing The Editors

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

NOW is the time for all good men among editors to come to the aid of Mrs Indira Gandhi's party. Mr Inder Gujral has found time to rig a "discussion in depth" exercise for an assortment of national and metropolitan editors. (One for "smaller" editors is to follow shortly!). After five days of saturation-infliction of governmental wisdom and the monotonous round of saturation-cocktails, neither the editors nor the Government knew in whose aid the expensive picnic in New Delhi was staged. Neither side had anything in particular to discuss either in depth or on the surface and the whole attempt was little more than an attempt at editor-management where news-management had failed, to get a less hostile Press for a leadership in political distress. Dr Triguna Sen was the singular exception among Ministers because he had done his homework well and could say something in depth on fertiliser and petroleum policy. The other encounters the editors had with the Government did not just take off.

One cannot help the clammy feeling that the monologue with the editors was the extension of Mrs Gandhi's brush with her own pack of picked special correspondents over breakfast at Bombay on the last day of her party's plenary session. Mrs Gandhi was obviously unhappy at the good press the Syndicate's show in Gandhinagar got and the obvious lack of enthusiasm among the chosen correspondents in projecting her party's image. She said she could send for their bosses in ten minutes

if she wanted and straighten all of them. An irreverent correspondent told her "please do it right now. Why ten minutes?"

Later, during her discussion in depth with the editors last week, one of them raised the point and she tried to convince him that she did not really mean all that. Her version was that she had merely said the Government had powers to bring the Press to order if it cared but it would not do that because it believed in a free Press. She also utilised the occasion to disown the remarks attributed to her about her ability to topple the Uttar Pradesh Ministry "in a trice" if she chose to.

Mrs Gandhi's penchant for toppling ministries is well known because it is on record that as the Congress President she gave the sanction for an extra-constitutional agitation to overthrow the Namboodiripad Ministry in Kerala over ten years ago. That was the beginning of a ferocious head-hunting, pre-Phizo style. She and her party have made the ouster of the C. B. Gupta Ministry an issue of political life and death. But will she be able to do it? A top Syndicate leader told this correspondent that Gupta would survive by 32 votes in the Assembly and if it came to the worst, 12 votes. So it would be some achievement if she gets C. B. Gupta out because her going for a mid-term poll depends on winning Uttar Pradesh back for herself.

There is something odd about the timing of the budget session, which contrary to custom, begins at the end of the week, on February 20. The

Touch And Go

If Mrs Gandhi fails in Uttar Pradesh, she would find it hard to survive the budget session. Her advisers claim that she is not heading a minority government because, depending on the issue, she can muster anything from 275 to 321 votes in the Lok Sabha in any division. Mrs Gandhi and her advisers know only the law of addition just as the Syndicate leaders know only the law of subtraction. The CPI(M) and the SSP cannot support the Government long though she can be sure of the CPI and the DMK and a few splinter groups. Outside the ruling party's hard core the rest of the vote is floating and it is claimed that most of the independents, the Telengana Congress MPs, the Akalis and who else would withdraw support to Mrs Gandhi during the budget session and she cannot get more than 250 to vote with her. Anyway, it is just touch and go during the four weeks left for the budget session and thereafter.

On balance, Mrs Gandhi has not gained in terms of numbers since the Bombay session and the expected mass upsurge is nowhere in sight. The pressure on prices is unnerving the political leadership as the dithering on vanaspati prices would show. For three days the Government hesitated about rejecting the demand for a rise in vanaspati prices. The country had run out of oil seeds and the

trade was pressuring the Government into permitting a price hike but political considerations weighed against such a step. Now the Government is trying to meet the situation by permitting import of soyabean and sunflower oil in the next six weeks but the general price spurt cannot be contained through ad hoc solutions. Very soon, the Government would have to agree to higher procurement prices under kulak pressure and amidst growing shortages it would be the blackmarket, black money and political blackmail by vested interests.

The next budget would be anything but growth-oriented because populism is the opiate of the masses. Assuming the budget gets through and the Government survives, what can the people expect outside the immediate reliefs the budget might offer as a short-term expedience?

Mrs Gandhi seems content to survive on a short-term strategy and there is very little thinking on the long-term implications. The Birlas have stampeded her into granting the licence for the Goa fertiliser plant and now the Government is buying its peace with the Tatas by offering them the Mithapur project in a modified form. The minor contradiction between the Marwari and Parsi capital is all but over and the National Democratic Front of the CPI's dreams should be taking shape, a paper combination of imaginary forces, to fight the right reaction and complete national democratic tasks, qualifying eminently for socialist aid. We can get the wagon order to fight recession in the engineering industry even if the IAC has to negotiate Boeing purchases. That is a measure of political change. And what is odd about it? Aeroflot's business interests in the United States are handled by Pan Am.

January 18, 1970

NOTICE

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Business Manager
Frontier

Bihar

SSP At Sonapur

N. K. SINGH

SONEPUR—the very place marks all the difference between the SSP and other political parties whose conferences were held at Ahmedabad, Bombay and Patna. Sonapur is a small village on the other side of the Ganga facing Patna while Ahmedabad, Bombay and Patna are... You know

The Sonapur national convention was called to discuss the policy of 'non-Congressism' in the light of the split in the Congress. Two-thirds of the delegates were from the two populous States of U.P. and Bihar, where the party still retains some kind of a mass base. Actually the socialist party was the first to work in Indian villages, although due to its very nature it could work only in two provinces. Even in the remote villages of Bihar and U.P. you can find the fruits of the tree whose roots were planted by Mr J. P. Narayan and Dr Ram Manohar Lohia.

It will be wrong to say that the main outcome of the Sonapur conference was the rift in the party. Actually there was always a rift in the SSP. It has been the least disciplined political organisation in the country. The open war of polemics among its top leaders and the individualistic postures adopted by its district level leaders have deepened the confusion. Although the SSP is an anti-Congress party or, better to say, its very roots can be found in 'non-Congressism', it is producing a familiar image, i.e. loose organisation, indisciplined action by the rank and file and a broad split in the leadership.

The acute crisis in the name of ideology has been brewing in the party since the death of Dr Lohia three years ago. As long as he dominated the party none dared challenge his leadership. But its highly individualistic leadership is now finding

it difficult to replace Lohia while the question of collective responsibility is yet to be settled.

POSITION OF THE SSP

States	Lok Sabha		Assemblies		Mid-term poll
	1962	1967	1962	1967	
Andhra	nil	nil	2	1	—
Assam	nil	nil	nil	4	—
Bihar	1	7	7	67	52
Haryana	1	nil	4	nil	—
Kerala	nil	3	20	19	—
M. P.	1	nil	14	10	—
Manipur	1	nil	nil	4	—
Maharashtra	nil	2	1	4	—
Mysore	nil	1	1	6	—
Orissa	1	1	nil	2	—
Punjab	nil	nil	nil	1	2
Rajasthan	nil	nil	5	8	—
Tamilnadu	nil	nil	1	2	—
U. P.	1	8	24	44	33
W. Bengal	nil	1	nil	7	9
Total	6	23	79	179	
Gujarat J & K and Nagaland	—nil.				

The former Chairman, Mr S. M. Joshi, the present Chairman, Karpuri Thakur, the General Secretary, Mr George Fernandes, the SSP's astute parliamentarian, Mr Madhu Limaye and the boss of the U.P. branch, Raj Narain, have different view-points on 'non-Congressism'.

Mr S. M. Joshi thinks that since Mrs Gandhi is following progressive policies, she should be given a chance to implement the people's demands. Non-Congressism is outdated and the SSP should choose friends and work with them on the basis of a long-term radical programme. His concept of the new coalition is clearly that of between likeminded parties including the Indira Congress.

Mr Madhu Limaye also thinks that after the Congress split non-Congressism has ceased to be relevant. But

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he finds no ideological differences between the Syndicate and the Indicate and wants to mobilise mass opinion on the basis that "the Indicate Congress is not less reactionary than the Syndicate Congress". The SSP policy in the new situation should be wholly programme oriented. The 10-point economic programme, which is accepted both by the old and the new Congress, is neither progressive nor socialist. Mr Limaye charges the Indira Congress with reducing the 10-point programme to a "four-and half-point programme" at Bombay, and that too without any time for its implementation.

'Merciless Blow'

Mr Raj Narain does not agree with Mr Limaye that the two groups of the Congress are one and the same. He feels that the party should go all out to dislodge Mrs Gandhi and cooperate with the Syndicate Congress for this purpose. His plea is that in politics if you aim at breaking some force, you must give your severest blow when it is actually breaking; if you are beating a snake, strike it most mercilessly when it is half dead or it will revive its poison and take your life. In any case, according to the politics of non-Congressism, a Congress in opposition is better than one in power.

The two leaders, Mr Madhu Limaye and Mr Raj Narain, came nearer during the Sonapur convention and both calculated that the association of the SSP was likely to lend a socialist halo to the Syndicate Congress also and that it would be saved from the embarrassment of securing the support of rightist elements. The SSP does not need likeminded parties for running a government. What is needed is an agreement or a programme and an honest will to implement it.

Messrs Karpuri Thakur and George Fernandes have taken a vague position—perhaps in an attempt to strike a balance between Joshi and Mr Raj Narain. They say "Topple Everyone". The essence of non-Congressism lies in opposing both the Congress groups. The SSP should stead-

fastly adhere to the party's basic programmes aiming at a total transformation of society without making opportunistic adjustments. A new socialist party can emerge as a balancing force between right reaction and the extreme left, which can draw people like Mr J. P. Narayan (something like the old Congress Socialist Party?)

After more than six formal meetings held for three days at Jamshedpur, one day at Patna and one day at Sonapur, besides many formal discussions during which the drafting committee members had to re-draft the political resolution five times, the draft resolution could be released barely two hours before being formally moved by Mr Limaye at the session. Essentially it was a compromise hammered out between the majority group of Mr Raj Narain and the minority group of Mr Joshi, and a split in the party was averted.

The new compromise draft resolution contained many major changes in the original. The conditions for supporting the Gupta Ministry in U.P. were stiffened. The original draft merely noted the abolition of land rent on uneconomic holdings and vaguely projected support to the Gupta Ministry whereas the compromise resolution makes it clear that the SSP will support the Gupta Ministry only after reaching an agreement on its entire time-bound programme outlined in the resolution. Participation in the Gupta Ministry will only take place when the other governments of the Syndicate party also implement programmes. In regard to Bihar the blanket ban on any cooperation with the PM's group has been lifted and it is now envisaged that in forming a government there the party can obtain the support of any party, of course keeping the time-bound minimum programme in view.

As before, the resolution underlines the intention of the party to oust the Indira-Government with the cooperation of all parties and therefore accuses the right CPI of raising false slogans to save the Government. But it also charges the Jana Sangh

and the Swatantra Party with efforts to perpetuate the status quo by unduly highlighting an illusory conflict of democracy and dictatorship.

The resolution, adopted unanimously among new slogans like 'Syndicate-Indicate Murdabad', has been woven around the old, worn-out slogan of the party—'Banish English, fix prices and create Bharat-Pak unity'. The 17-point programme for the Centre and 13-point programme for the States to qualify for support is certainly a big improvement on the previous election manifestos of the SSP. There are several additions and also concretisation of its previous demands. In the programme for the Centre, the pride of place has gone to abolition of the right of property and a ceiling on personal expenditure whereas in the programme for States abolition of land revenue on uneconomic holdings, redistribution of land, lowering of the ceiling and cancellation of fraudulent transfers have been given priority.

CPM and SSP

Although one of the three amendments accepted to the draft resolution condemned the West Bengal Government for its failure to maintain law and order (hence the attack on the Marxists), the stand over the Congress split by both the parties is somewhat alike. "The present splitting of the Congress has no ideological basis", notes the political resolution of the SSP in a tone very much similar to the CPM Politbureau's viewpoint that the two Congresses do not represent two fundamentally different class interests but do represent two variations of the same bourgeois-landlord class line, which they have come to consider as respective ways out of the present economic-political crisis.

Since the socialists are traditionally used to strong language there is little politeness or decorum at discussion at local meetings and wider conferences. The special convention at Sonapur was no exception. During the 14-hour marathon debate in which about 140 amendments were

moved for consideration, heckling started right from the start, particularly over points made by those who sought deletion of laudatory references to the UP Chief Minister, C. B. Gupta. The entire deliberations were punctuated by noisy scenes, jeerings and slogan-shouting.

On January 9, the night session turned so ugly that in the scuffle one member fainted and was removed to hospital. It all happened when the 55 anti-UF workers from West Bengal picked up a fist fight when the chairman (now ex-) of the Bengal unit rose to speak. Their grievance was that the seven delegates from West Bengal who are participants in the UF are bogus and the State Committee of the party should be dissolved. However their demand was accepted after the conference and a new State Committee will be formed in West Bengal.

Be it inside or outside Parliament, shoe-hurling is a speciality of SSP members. During the last hours of discussions 'it was like a parliament' scene when Mr R. N. Jha, MP and a member of the National Committee, accused the former Bihar Minister, Mr S. K. Singh, of practising casteism. After it, the discussion was suspended for about an hour as the honourable members indulged in fist-fighting and threw shoes and chappals at one another. A fellow journalist remarked, 'It is civil disobedience'.

Nothing went according to schedule at Lohia Nagar (venue of the session) mainly to Lohia's principle of No Discipline.

Tailpiece: The other day a SSP worker declared that the party should be liquidated as it has achieved its goal, i.e. split in the Congress.

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The Peasants Of The Parganas—VI

ASHIM MUKHOPADHYAY

THE emergence of the United Front raised great hopes all over West Bengal. The landless peasants blessed the new Government's proposal to recover the surplus land. In every district the starving people sided with the Front leaders and reorganised themselves against the jotedars, hoarders and other enemies. In the Parganas, the people of Bhangar, Sonarpur, Haroa, Sandeshkhali, Gosaba and other Sunderban areas began attacking the fisheries, and fought with the paid goondas of the jotedars.

But though the people were vigorously on the march, their leaders could not keep pace with them. So far as the Bangla Congress was concerned, it followed the same line which it is following at present. Mr Ajoy Mukherjee, Mr Sushil Dhara and their devotees never supported the idea of recovering surplus land from the jotedars. Readers may remember that in the previous part of this series there was a reference to a memorandum of the CPI (1959) in which allegations were made against Mr Hrishikesh Tripathi, a near relation of Mr Ajoy Mukherjee, of fake transfer of land. At that time Mr Mukherjee was a Cabinet Minister and he might not have been ignorant of these misdeeds.

During 1967, whenever the peasants or their organisations committed any excess, Mr Mukherjee, who was in charge of both Home and Police, interfered and thus indirectly saved the jotedars. Today he and his colleagues blame Mr Jyoti Basu, the CPI (M) Home Minister, for making the police his puppets. But no one can forget how they themselves used the police against the peasant-workers in 1967.

The CPI leaders, who always preferred agricultural revolution to a

peasant revolution, did not take the risk of bloodshed. Although today, for their very existence they have entered into the competition of land grabbing, the idea of agricultural revolution or peaceful transition to socialism and similar nonsense still envelops their minds.

The case of the CPI (M) was almost similar. Although its leaders gave calls for recovering surplus land, they concentrated their attention on vested land and made very little effort to recover benami land. Mr Harekrishna Konar has told this reporter that "during 1967 the consciousness of the peasant-workers did not reach the stage of recovering benami land."¹ Benami or fake transfer is an age-old problem and none but the innocent—or worse—can remain indifferent to it. The fact was that the CPI (M) also was afraid of the jotedars.

The composition of the West Bengal Assembly was another factor. Unlike in 1969, the Front in 1967 could not secure a clear-cut majority. The Congress, though ousted from power, held enough seats to terrify its opponent. Naturally the Front began a very cautious journey. Lastly, as the numerical strength of the two left fronts did not differ greatly from one another, nothing radical could be hoped for. Here lies the origin of the Naxalbari movement or the CPI (ML). Those who say that the Naxalbari movement has originated from utter frustration, misinterpret history with a definite motive. Actually the movement emerged as a protest against the increasing revisionist and neo-revisionist activities among the Indian Communists.

At the same time it should also be remembered that though the CPI (M)

¹ Interview: Mr Harekrishna Konar (CPI-M).

was one of the main killers at Naxalbari, it could not reject altogether the slogans and programme of the Naxalites and absorbed some of them which suited its ideology. In doing so, the CPI(M) itself benefited, because these new slogans and programme made a great appeal to the militant peasantry and the party succeeded in securing a base more solid than those of its opponents. Today the "Marxists" deny this fact but their denial cannot shelve the truth.² Infusion of Naxalite ideas into the CPI(M) had another effect. It hastened the division of the BPKS. Although the split among the Indian Communists had taken place three years earlier, apparently they were still united on their peasant-front. But the increasing militancy of the CPI(M), stemming from and since the infusion of Naxalite influence into their programme, led to a breach inside the BPKS. In December 1967 the CPI held a meeting at Amravati (Maharashtra), severely condemned the activities of the CPI(M) and set up their own peasant organization.

However the drive for the recovery of surplus lands continued and although the Front Government fell, the drive continued and up to June, 1968, 9492.24 acres were vested in the State. The following table gives the districtwise figures.

	(in acres)
The Parganas ..	32856.17
Howrah ..	1381.85
Hooghly ..	1878.77
Burdwan ..	4866.18
Bankura ..	1529.17
Birbhum ..	2555.02
Purulia ..	27163.74
Nadia ..	5054.64
Midnapur ..	5012.00
Malda ..	2504.50
Coochbehar ..	1653.77
Jalpaiguri ..	2584.08
Darjeeling ..	73690.00
Murshidabad ..	2730.70
West Dinajpur ..	24.1075 ³

² *Tarai Andolaner Report* by Mr Kanu Sanyal (CPI-ML).

³ *Paschimbarer Gramin Arthaniti o Khadya Paristhiti* by Ramen Nag—p 17.

The fall of the United Front Government was mainly due to an internal conspiracy planned by its Food Minister, Dr P. C. Ghosh. He slackened collection of food grains and allowed the jotedars, rich peasants and hoarders to create an artificial scarcity. The target of the Front Ministry was ten lakh tons, but Dr Ghosh told reporters: "I shall be more than happy if ten thousand tons of Aus is procured".

Food Crisis

Within a few months rice disappeared from the open market and its price went up to Rs 5 to Rs 6 per kg. Prices of other essential commodities also shot up. This crisis, together with the disturbances in the industrial sector, provided Dr Ghosh an opportunity to topple the Front.

So far as the peasants of the Parganas were concerned, from the outset they offered stiff opposition to the PDF Government. Dr Ghosh, who used to describe this district as a communist stronghold, mobilised a large police force in its strategic parts. Fifteen police camps were set up at Sonarpur, ten at Sandeshkhali, six at Mathurapur, five at Kakdwip and five at Bhangar.⁴ The main aim of the police was to help the jotedars to renew their misdeeds.

On November 30, the OCs, SPs, the SIs and other officers of different thanas tortured the people of their respective localities. The Assistant OC of the Sonarpur area who had already prepared a list of the local Front leaders, led a door-to-door operation and beat up everybody without any discrimination. He himself narrated the incidents to me and remarked, "If you ask the CPI(M) leaders anything about me, they will tell you—'Oh he had beaten us mercilessly.'" But since the restoration of the United Front this OC and so many other police officers all over the State have turned their coats.

⁴ Interviews: Mr Kshudiram Bhattacharya (CPI-M).

Mr Hemanta Ghoshal (CPI-M).

Recently this reporter again interviewed the same OC and he said, "Yes, yes, Jyoti Babu is the man. He knows how to rule, he is much more efficient than Dr B. C. Roy or Mr P. C. Sen."

I asked him about his relationship with the local CPI(M) and he replied—"Oh, they are really very good people..." "But you did not say so in 1967"—I interrupted him. This time he said nothing but stared at me with his large liquid eyes. From my conversations with officers like this OC I have come to the conclusion that prostitutes and police are of the same nature. Just as the former pass from hand to hand and submit themselves to their ever-changing masters, so do the latter.⁵

From December, 1967 to February 1968 everywhere in the South 24-Parganas the jotedars and their men tried to reoccupy their vested land which they had lost to the militant peasants during the short rule of the Front. At Bhangar, Sonarpur, Lakshmikantapur and Canning they bribed the local police and thus got a free hand in destroying the paddy plants and huts of the poor.⁶

Along with much physical repression a large number of peasants were jailed under the PD Act and the DIR. Yet the Ghosh Ministry could not hold the fort. At Jalalberia, Gopalgunge, Kundakhali, Godabar and many villages under the Kultali PS peasants attacked the jotedars, looted their granaries and distributed the paddy among themselves. Similar things happened in the Jainagar areas. In many cases peasants of different villages helped one another to cut their paddy. They also fought against hoarding and smuggling and in some places forced the sellers to sell rice at Rs 3.50 per palli (2½ kg.)⁷

On January 15, 1969, Messrs

⁵ Interview: Mr P. Bhanja Choudhury, former Assistant OC, Sonarpur PS.

⁶ *Ganasakti*, December 1967—February 1968.

⁷ Interview: Mr Arun Ghosh (CPI-M).

Khagen Dasgupta, Bijay Singh Nahar, Rabindralal Sinha, Dr Pratap Chunder, Abdus Sattar and some other Congress leaders joined the Ghosh Cabinet. On February 12 thousands of peasants, workers and students assembled at Sonarpur, condemned the PDF-Congress coalition, supported the United Front and vowed to carry on their struggle till the fall of the Ministry.⁸

At last the Centre nodded before the militant masses of West Bengal. On February 20 the Ghosh Ministry was liquidated and President's Rule began. But peace did not return. On the contrary the joint repression of the police and the jotedars was further intensified. At its 19th Conference held at Sonarpur on May 31, the BPKS criticised the Governor and challenged him to answer their allegations.⁹

Between February and July, 33 persons were killed in different parts of the province and when the harvesting season began, this figure went up to 60. According to unofficial sources the figure was much higher.

During the last week of October, the jotedars of Baulia and Minakha attacked some poor peasants and khet majurs, cut away their paddy and set fire to their huts. The victims went to the local police outposts and lodged their complaints. On November 13 the "Daroga Baboo" came to the villages and to the great astonishment of the humble villagers arrested some of them.

On November 21, at dead of night, some constables of Jhupkhali (Sandeshkhali PS) made a forcible entry into the hut of Shyamballav Sardar, a khet majur and tried to kidnap his wife Shaila. The woman cried for help and villagers rushed to the spot from all directions. However the culprits managed to escape.¹⁰

⁸ *Ganasakti*, February 13, 1968.

⁹ Report of the 19th Conference of the WPKS (CPI-M) May-June, 1968.

¹⁰ *Ganasakti*, November 22-26, 1968.

On November 28, when I was passing through a lonely village road of Champhati (Canning area) I saw some constables beating a young peasant girl. From the girl I came to learn that her only offence was that she had refused to sleep with them.

Atrocities were committed at Dhaniakhali, Pandua (Hooghly), Kalna, Memari, Polba, Raina, Basatpur (Burdwan), Dubrajpur (Birbhum), Keshpur, Kanthi (Midnapur), Islampur, Kumargunge and Gangarampur (West Dinajpur).¹¹

During President's Rule, the Governor made no serious attempt to restrict hoarding and blackmarketing of foodgrains. Though the people had been suffering from an acute scarcity of rice and though up to June only 2½ lakh tons of rice had been procured, the Governor took no measures to prevent hoarding of the winter paddy (Aman). As a result, the jotedars and owners of rice mills and husking machines hoarded a huge amount of paddy. The former Bloc Development Officer of Basanti (South 24-Parganas) told me that at the end of 1968, when the "dehoarding operation" began, the BDO and his men were secretly informed that the Anchal Pradhan of Charavidya, a notorious jotedar, had hoarded several hundred maunds of paddy. At once they went to Charavidya and entered the house of the Pradhan. They searched every nook and corner but could not find out even a grain of paddy. As they were going back the Pradhan said, "Oh, Baboos, won't you lose your jobs if go empty handed? Come, come inside, take your bath and meals here. I shall give you 40 quintals of paddy." ("বাবুরা যে দেখাচি শূদ্র হাতে যেতিনে! তা কিচু না নিয়ে গেলিপরি কি চাকরী থাইকবে? আসুন, আসুন ইখানে চান খাওয়া করুন, যাবার সময় ৪০ কুইন্টাল ধান দিব")¹²

On December 5 the BPKS, the Krishak Samity (CPI's peasant organisation born in 1967), the San-

jukta Kishan Samiti (RSP) and the Krishak and Khetmajur Federation (SUC) met at Calcutta and adopted a resolution regarding joint action.¹³

Although this resolution was not actually put into practice, it did not prove completely fruitless because talk of such joint action made the peasants more active. As a result, harvesting clashes intensified. At Sonarpur and Bhangar the Naskar jotedars had their paddy fields encircled by their hired goondas and tried to cut the crop. But the peasants were always numerically far superior and well disciplined and in almost all cases they drove out their enemies.¹⁴

New Hopes

Restoration of the United Front to power in 1969 raised new hopes in the minds of the peasants and workers. In the Parganas especially, the khet majurs received a new impetus. From March to August last year they occupied many big fisheries at Bhangor, Sonarpur, Haroa and Canning and thus broke the backbone of some notorious jotedars. Along with the occupation of fisheries they also started a drive to detect surplus land and up to November have recovered 6,359,458 acres. This attempt to recover surplus land is one important characteristic of the present peasant movement.

In the Bongaon subdivision, the Krishak Sabha CPI (M) and the Krishak Samity (CPI) are working hard to stop illegal transfers of the land of the Adibasis. They are preparing lists of jotedars and rich peasants responsible for these activities. On November 26, 1969 3000 Adibasis armed with bows, spears and lathis paraded through the village roads of Bongaon and then went to the local SDO's office. There they submitted an eight-point memorandum demanding immediate recovery of their lost lands and protection against further exploitation.¹⁵ In other dis-

¹³ *Ganasakti*, December 6 and 7, 1968.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, December 1-31, 1968.

¹⁵ *The Ichhamati*, edited by Mr K. D. Biswas, Bongaon, December 1, 1969.

¹¹ *Ibid*, July 1968-January 1969.

¹² Interview: The former BDO of Basanti (South 24-Parganas).

districts also, the movement has made progress. Everywhere the peasants have recovered surplus land and on several occasions sacrificed their lives. Their districtwise performance can be seen in the following table.

Figures in acres

District	From August 1967 to June 1968	Up to November 1969
24-Parganas	32856.17	63,594.58
Howrah	1381.85	2,781.70
Hooghly	1878.77	3,858.60
Burdwan	4866.18	18,942.40
Bankura	1529.17	16,520.46
Birbhum	2555.02	6,126.68
Purulia	27163.74	89,534.11
Nadia	5054.64	10,515.07
Midnapur	5012.00	12,958.48
Malda	2504.50	7,940.39
Coochbehar	1653.77	9,764.29
Jalpaiguri	2584.08	12,470.07
Darjeeling	73690.00	4,648.76
Murshidabad	2730.70	7,996.21
West Dinajpur	24,1075	22,798.90 ¹⁶

(including ceded area)

In South 24-Parganas a large number of bheries have been occupied. The local jotedars and fishery owners offered stiff opposition but ultimately gave way to popular pressure. The following table gives the names and size of some fisheries in the Sonarpur area which have been occupied since March, 1969.

Fisheries	Owners	Area	Size (in bighas)
Bamunghata	Bibhuti Ghose	Sonarpur, Bhangar	2200
Samukpota	Manmatha Mandal	"	950
Jeler Bheri	Khagen Mandal	"	1500
Hoglabada	Pasupati Ray	"	1200
Keutemara	Pranab Ray	"	1500 ¹⁷

The following table gives the size of the fisheries occupied in the Canning Circle.

¹⁶ Data supplied by the Director of Land Records and Surveys, W. Bengal.

¹⁷ Interview: Sibdas Bhattacharya (CPI-M). The list is incomplete.

Number	Size (in bighas)
1	.. 1387
2	.. 1200
3	.. 1383
4	.. 1000
5	.. 1000
6	.. 2185
7	.. 22100
8	.. 2000
9	.. 1200
10	.. 773
11	.. 750
12	.. 579
13	.. 510
14	.. 950
15	.. 450
16	.. 300
17	.. 510
18	.. 700
19	.. 250 ¹⁸

These movements against benami land and fisheries are not entirely devoid of humour. At Itinda (South-east 24-Parganas) a strip of land owned by a jotedar has been required for long for digging an irrigation canal. As usual, the owner has stalled its requisitioning through eleven court injunctions. The local peasants had been thinking of counteracting this. At last the chance came. On the day of the jotedar's daughter's marriage, as the bridegroom was trying to cross that strip of land, the peasants assembled and obstructed his journey. They were in no mood to let him proceed until the land was released for digging the

canal. As the marriage was going to be jeopardised, the jotedar came to terms with the peasants by assuring them that the land would be released. But next day the peasants, by now wise enough to see through his

¹⁸ Interview: A. Biswas, Circle Inspector, Canning.

game, again obstructed the "Basibia" (kushandika) or the remaining part of the marriage and ultimately the jotedar had to withdraw the cases from the court.¹⁹

Along with the detection and recovery of surplus land the United Front Government has passed some important legislation. The Homestead Land Act (August) has conferred the right of ownership of homestead land (up to 1/12th of an acre) on poor peasants and agricultural areas free of cost. The Barga-dar Ordinance has banned all evictions for one year. The Act for Utilisation of Fallow Cultivable Land has empowered collectors to requisition and lease out such lands to the poor peasants or labourers for three years. The share will be: the peasant 65%, the owner 25% and the government 10%. Another Bill aims at fixing the maximum holding at 25 acres per family and a graded system of land revenue—making family holdings up to 3 acres rent free, keeping unaltered the revenue on holdings from 3 to 7 acres, increasing it to 1.25 times from 7 to 10 acres, 2 times from 10 to 15 acres, 3 times from 15 to 20 acres and 4 times beyond 20 acres.²⁰

During this short period of 11 months the Front has also tried to organise the workers of tea gardens and different industries.

However the future of West Bengal is not bright, the Front is riven with dissensions. During 1967 there was one Dr Ghosh, but this year there are many. Not a single district has escaped from inter-party clashes. Some topranking leaders are denying this fact; according to them what goes on is not inter-party clashes but "action" against the jotedars. Thereby they try to hide a great offence. Anybody going to any party office in any village will, within a few hours,

¹⁹ Interview: Kshudiram Bhattacharya (CPI-M).

²⁰ Data supplied by the Deputy Secretary, Land Revenue, Govt. of W. Bengal.

begin to doubt the unity of the Front. Only a few weeks ago I met the SUC leaders at their Baruipur office. During the conversation they produced two lists and read out the names of some jotedars and dacoits and described them as supporters of the CPI (M). After this I met the CPI (M) leaders at Jainagar and they also made similar complaints against the SUC and the RSP.²¹ It will not do to accuse, as the Front partners do, the CPI (ML) alone as trouble-maker. It is mostly a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

The jotedars and moneylenders cannot themselves forcibly enter the political parties of the Front. On the contrary they are invited by the latter to join them. The major partners of the Front cannot deny this allegation. At Haroa (24-Parganas) the local Bangla Congress has opened its office at the residence of a big jotedar. At Basanti, the Marxist Forward Bloc at its secret meeting invited some notorious pro-Congress jotedars and induced them to join the party.²² At Lakshmikantapur, the SUC has been supporting the cause of a big jotedar who has still kept more than 1,000 bighas of land through fake transfer.²³ At Midnapore, the CPI has cleverly managed to save its pet jotedars.²⁴ A notorious jotedar of Jhargram who had so long been an active Congress worker and who garlanded Mr Morarji Desai during his visit to Midnapore, has very recently garlanded the CPI (M) Secretary Mr Promode Das Gupta.²⁵

If these things continue, neither the recovery of benami land nor the enactment of legislation will do any good to the people. For instance, in spite of the propaganda of Mr Harekrishna Konar, several lakh acres of "benami land" are still under the possession of a few jotedars and since 1967, 15,000 injunctions have been

placed over the recovered land.²⁶ This fact proves that the claim of the Front regarding recovery of lands is a big exaggeration.

The Great Debt

The Front Government is doing very little to remove the rural indebtedness. The total rural indebtedness in India rose to the colossal figure of Rs 2,490 crores in 1961-62 and now must be over Rs 3,000 crores. It means that the peasants have to foot annually a bill of Rs 300 crores as interest only. It is true that a part of the loans is taken by landlords and rich peasants, but in reality the major part of the indebtedness is borne by the small peasants. This badly affects agricultural production. The government and co-operative societies supply only about 15 per cent of the loan requirements and yet a major part of this loan goes to big farmers and rich peasants. It means that the overwhelming majority of ordinary peasants have to depend on moneylenders who exact exorbitant interest. At Bongaon most of the co-operative societies have been sabotaged by the local rich peasants. Those which still exist are on the verge of ruin. The secretaries and members of the executive committee of these societies are in almost all cases wealthy peasants and they themselves misappropriate the loans by investing them as "dadan" among the poor peasants. At Chandpara (Bongaon) the local political workers told me that the moneylenders there exact even 300% interest against their "dadan". "Nilkar sahibs of the 19th century are still among us"—remarked an old peasant who was listening to our conversation.

Mere recovery and distribution of land cannot improve the condition of the peasantry unless the problem of their indebtedness is wisely tackled. During the lean period a large number of bargadars, khet majurs or poor peasants will be forced to sell secretly their land to the jotedars

²⁶ Interview: The Director of Land Records, Govt. of W. Bengal.

and moneylenders. Outwardly they will continue to pose as the real owners but in reality the produce of the land will go to the granaries of the jotedars.

Again, though the price of rice is still more or less fixed, the prices of other commodities are spiralling. Cultivators of jute are still at the mercy of the moneylenders. Who is to save them? "Frontwallas" are busy hurling stones at one another.

Indeed the peasants of West Bengal cannot consider themselves lucky so long as they are under petty bourgeois leadership.

(Concluded)

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²¹ Interviews: Arun Ghose (CPI-M).
Yaqub Pailan (SUC).

²² Interview: the former BDO (Basanti).

²³ Interview: Arun Ghose (CPI-M).

²⁴ Report of the GS of the WBPKS (CPI-M), 1969.

²⁵ Interview: Ananta Majhi (CPI).

Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

ALL of a sudden urban property has become the latest gimmick in the game of socialism being played all over India. From the Indira Congress toying with ceilings on urban property and then doing re-thinking on it, down to the UF Government in West Bengal deciding on taxes which unfortunately clash with those proposed by the Calcutta Corporation, the subject is very much in the news.

Mr Prasanta Sur, the Calcutta Mayor, may be right in thinking that the Government should not poach on municipal preserves; but then faced with shortage of resources the Government is left with only a few choices and this is one. As yet owners of big properties do not look like leading demonstrations to Writers' Building against the proposed taxes.

No tears need be shed over the difficulties of owners of big urban properties about which we shall be told in due course by the nationalist Press. The Government and the Corporation, however, have to look at the whole question of urban housing with which the question of taxation on property is closely linked. If the UF thinks the additional taxes will be paid by the owners, they are only fooling themselves. As usual the taxes will be passed on to the tenants.

Without a proper housing policy, however, there are going to be far-reaching effects which will hit the common people in the cities very soon. The shortage in urban housing is acute in Calcutta. Already all this talk on urban property has had the effect of stopping a lot of construction of big houses. Masons and construction workers are said to be sitting idle. The general panic is affecting even small houses.

For some time past there had been a fall in the rents of upper bracket flats and houses in the city. As a result the pressure on medium-and

lower-bracket flats eased somewhat. The trend is now likely to be reversed and as a consequence the pressure on small and medium flats will increase, forcing up the rents. This is bound to happen as housing still remains more or less a private affair, apart from some flats built here and there by the Government. Even here the Government seems to be more keen on building higher-priced flats. A beginning in the right direction could have been made by making the Salt Lake area a completely Government-owned one, but that was not done. Money should have been available from the LIC. As it is, there is talk of even handing over the existing flats in different parts of the city to their present tenants. Private property, it seems, is to be encouraged.

As a result, therefore, of the combined policies of the Government and the Corporation, the housing position in Calcutta is going to worsen at an even greater pace than it is doing now. Those who have to look around for another flat in the near future must get ready for a little less accommodation for substantially more rent.

* * *

Calcutta Corporation no doubt needs more money. The Corporation has a point when it says that lakhs of people come from outside, avail themselves of the facilities in the city and go back, contributing little or nothing to the city itself. Little imagination, however, has been shown in the recent proposals for increasing Corporation revenues. Enhancement of the rates, of course, is a permanent standby of municipal administrations everywhere. Octroi, being discussed since long, is another. Too many Indian towns and cities have this relic from feudal times. The only effect of these imposts will be to raise the cost of living of the com-

mon man. The businessmen are not going to pay the octroi from their profits.

In fact one can even think that both the Corporation and the Government hesitate when it comes to big business. This is clear from the proposed tax on employment according to which those earning Rs 10,000 and above will have to pay tax to the Corporation. The incidence will be purely on the employees even though they are comparatively well placed. It may even be that there are some elements of chauvinism, since there is a general impression that the majority of good jobs and big properties in Calcutta are held by people from outside the State.

The proposed employment tax could have been worked out in a different way to yield the maximum revenue. For one thing, it looks too much like income tax, which is the sole preserve of the Union Government. For another, the return could be made much more and incidence of the tax placed squarely on the shoulders of big business, where it should be.

To take one concrete case. In one business house I know the employees number more than 1,000 of whom only about 20 can be taxed as proposed. Thus the tax would yield not more than Rs 2000 or 3000 rupees. However, if the minimum tax of Rs 25 is levied on each employee, it would fetch the Corporation Rs 25,000. This, however, should be made payable by the employer and not by the employee. In terms of the total wage bill, the amount will be negligible and cannot make any difference to employment potential. Moreover, of the amount collected by the Corporation in this way, about 60% in any case would have gone to the Central Government by way of income-tax. This would be a much better way of getting the required money for Calcutta than begging from the Centre. Even exempting small units, it would be easy to collect annually Rs 2 or 3 crores. There is no reason why the amount per head should not be put at Rs 100 and 10

or 12 crores collected every year. Following the same principle, the municipalities in the industrial belt around Calcutta could also get out of their financial doldrums and make the areas habitable.

Such a head tax would be eminently based on equity. The services rendered by the Calcutta Corporation and the municipalities are directly proportionate to the number of peo-

ple working in business houses and industries. Much of the mess in the urban areas is also the result of these businesses taking everything from the community and giving nothing in return.

No doubt there will be a hue and cry from big business if this tax is proposed. They can be reminded that it was imposed in the UK and the heavens did not fall there.

The Disreputable Industry

A.P.M.

IN 1968, the jute industry sent a trade delegation to the USSR. The delegation has not yet published its report. The trip was financed by the Government. That is at least one reason why the outlines of its findings should have been released to the public. Enquiries as to why the report remains unpublished are never fully answered. This is just one aspect of the enigma that is the jute industry.

Meanwhile, the big-size association that looks after the majority of the jute mills carries on its public image building activities. The big dailies acknowledge their gratefulness to the Valuable Advertiser by keeping clear of the dark side that, in between the furious pace of image-building promotions, is sometimes unintentionally uncovered. The full-page ads usually repeat the refrain that the industry is almost being strangled by government taxation. They, however, avoid quite a few other issues, despite their relevance to the industry.

For instance, the Government has been quietly sleeping over a promise made in 1967 to lend Rs. 5 crores to the industry for modernisation of plant machinery. The subject dutifully crops up every year at the annual meeting of the association. But the forgetfulness of the Government is only mildly referred to. This model behaviour of the industry may seem a bit unusual at first. The fact is that the industry knows that the Government knows that once

lent, those five crores of rupees may not all be properly accounted for. Instead of modernisation the jute mills are most likely to go in for capacity expansion. This might occur in the production of those goods, gunnies for example, which fetch inflated prices in the internal market but the overseas demand for which is fast declining, particularly in the West, so long the main market for Indian jute goods. Since the industry knows the reason for the governments' delay in lending the money it is anxious not to pressurise the Government publicly for action. For the reason, as stated, reflects a disreputable aspect of the industry.

The recent strike in the industry had something not well known to the public. When it was certain that the strike would take place, the mills stopped buying raw jute and saw to it that their stocks were fully utilised. The price of raw jute came down. First the bumper crop and then the stoppage of purchase hit the farmers hard enough. The strike lasted eight days. Buying of raw jute was then resumed, ensuring simultaneously that the prices did not exceed the pre-strike level. Meanwhile, the prices of jute goods registered a sharp rise. For one month following the strike, the prices remained exorbitant, and according to a trade source, the mills each made an average Rs 50 lakh windfall profit in the process. The public was told that

the strike and the settlement were a big trade union victory. But it was a famous trade union victory for which the industry is grateful.

The industry has a complaints committee, to which overseas complaints about the quality of Indian jute goods are referred. The findings of the committee are never made public. Why? Because in most cases it would be letting the cat out of the bag, a rather disadvantageous situation as far as the industry is concerned. In the meantime, wherever statistical quality control (SQC) methods have been applied in order to improve productivity, the results have generally demonstrated the irrelevance of two favourite industry-promoted myths—that low productivity is due to old plant machinery and low labour productivity. They have shown how the inadequacies of the present management are seriously hampering production, obstructing a reasonable utilisation of the installed capacity.

The ads promoted by the industry often refer to the fact that the Pakistani industry is gaining superiority over the Indian in some respects. The reason for this, according to the industry, is the planned government help to improve the Pakistani industry. The ads, however, keep silent about the other aspect of the matter, which is the Pakistani industry's efforts to do better. For instance, constant research goes on to improve jute cultivation and already, a difference in the element of per acre yield, Pakistan's 3.5 bales compared to India's 2.8, has been achieved. The Indian research institute cannot claim similar achievements.

With a cunning which invites admiration, the industry admits that it neglects research and development activities deliberately, because of lack of money. This is once again a Goebbelsian exercise. All the time it is making money. The strike merely provided the latest chance to do so. And the money made here is being invested elsewhere. That is where all the money is going. The industry, meanwhile, continues to grow poorer.

"Comic Opera"

READER

THE "crucial" United Front meeting of January 21 will be over when this journal appears on the stalls this week. Which is a pity and another reminder of the difficulty with which a weekly lives with a rapidly changing situation. And, in this particular case, it is dangerous to make any forecasts. For one never knows what might happen next. In fact the question till the evening of January 21 will continue to be, "Will there be a meeting at all?"

For everyone knows what happened a week earlier. The Front was literally split when two groups sat at two different places, waiting for godot. The whole situation had an element of the bizarre in it. Two groups of elderly people, claiming to be serious politicians, pretending that there had been a mistake and all the while talking over the telephone to each other. One can hardly dismiss the spectacle as silly, particularly when the people concerned have been vested with the responsibility of ruling a State. A sense of callousness seems to be creeping into our politics, a feeling that nothing matters, not even our grotesque behaviour.

The argument has been heard that a non-meeting was essential to prevent a split. An argument with which one can hardly agree. For how long, it might reasonably be asked, can these well-wishers of the Front keep it alive with these juvenile tactics? If Mr Ajoy Mukherjee and Mr Jyoti Basu are representatives of two separate classes, then they are bound to come into open conflict as soon as their class interests collide. So instead of trying to keep them apart, it should be the attempt of the peace-makers to arrange for continuous dialogues between the two so that at least a

working arrangement could be arrived at for implementing the 32-point programme. In the absence of any arrangement, the people become the worst sufferers not because of the invectives hurled by both sides but because governmental work has come to a near standstill. For heaven's sake let the files move, even if at the old speed of one in every six months.

The quixotic actions of the UF leaders certainly help their adversaries. The Press had a juicy propaganda point against it last week. The *Statesman* says that while nothing very substantial was lost by the United Front's inability to meet at one place, the failure of the two groups to meet after finding out that they were at cross purposes, should cause eyebrows to be lifted. The enthusiasm for a rapprochement had of course already evaporated primarily because of the CPI(M)'s circular letter which placed the Chief Minister in the dock by demanding unconditional withdrawal of his comments on the Government. While the non-meeting has probably spared the constituents another painful scene, the consolation is short-lived as the next scheduled meeting threatens to be as unprofitable as the one that did not occur. The farce, surely unprecedented, will continue to unfold simply because none of the constituents wishes to go into the political cold. The Bangla Congress may also be obliged to go through the motions of launching the second phase of the satyagraha. The atmosphere, already vitiated by Mr Promode Das Gupta's letter and the mini-clash between the Chief and the Deputy Chief Minister, cannot be more poisonous than it is now. And perhaps the only way of guarding against even more poison, is to allow some-

one to mix up the venues once again next Wednesday.

According to the *Hindusthan Standard*, the cancellation of the Front meeting wasn't exactly a comedy of errors. An element of deliberateness marked the decision of each group to stay put where it was and not to move to the other venue which wasn't far away. This suggested reluctance among the major constituents to meet on a common platform and hammer out a unity resolution. This was strange in view of the decision to meet a week later.

The paper goes on to say that the division of parties last Wednesday was neither accidental nor meaningless. One group is dominated by the CPI(M) and the other by the Bangla Congress which is reflective of the pulls and counterpulls inside the Front. One reason for the reluctance of the Front partners to meet has been to save the coalition from immediate collapse. Presumably a peace formula had not been worked out and misunderstanding over the meeting place was a convenient excuse to get some more time to reach an accord between the two groups. Whether this will be possible is for the future to say. One can only suggest that the intervening week should give the leaders a little more time to think over the basic issues involved.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* has found last Wednesday's incident to be a comic opera. Recalling the incidents that day, it says these indicate wheels within a wheel. The Chief Minister's objection to the changed venue should have settled the matter and the meeting should have been held at the original place. But that did not happen and no party was prepared to change its chosen venue. The ABP also feels that it was not simple misunderstanding that kept the two groups apart. The refusal of the parties to sit around a table foreshadows the shape of things to come. The "misunderstanding" presumably arose from the CPI(M)'s letter demanding unconditional withdrawal of the Chief Minister's remarks; his decision to

reject the demand made it uncomfortable for that party to attend to participate in the talks. And since it could not afford to boycott the meeting, a "misunderstanding" had to be created to avoid further complications.

PM & Editors

News has appeared in the Press that the Union Government has arranged a meeting of editors of the country's dailies with the Prime Minister. Such meetings are not new. In West Bengal itself, the Information Minister had held such talks with the editors. What is significant is the time chosen. Mrs Gandhi and her Congress must be feeling pretty uncomfortable at their uncertain majority which caused her to try this method to extract support from the Press. One can only wish her the best of luck, for it is extremely difficult to suppose that the gentlemen she would be meeting would be able to tell her anything at all. The Prime Minister is mightily mistaken if she hasn't realised as yet that their voices are the voices of the Tatas, the Goenkas, the Birlas and various other business groups. She can have the Press support her, if she can satisfy these people with whatever they want. If she fails to do so, then no number of meetings would yield any result. The editors' employers would only be slightly more angry at her when they come to know of the bills these gentlemen would submit after the four-day talks. Incidentally it is shameful that the Union Government which has no money to spare for development projects, should continue to incur expenses on such a farce.

The Haves

At least one class of people should be really happy with the United

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Bombay-16

Front Government, namely, the reporters. One doesn't know whose brainwave it was, but now each of them is getting a card from the Government for free entry to hockey and football matches. These gentlemen have nothing to do with sports. But then they are friendly with the Ministers. Meanwhile sports fans will continue to queue up for long hours and, who knows, may get killed.

Book Review

THE LONESOME PILGRIM

By Atulananda Chakraborty
Allied Publishers, Calcutta.
Rs. 20.00

HERE is a book on the decline of Gandhism in post-British India. The Mahatma has passed into history and his views are being built up into a system of social philosophy. Is Gandhism a social philosophy capable of resolving the conflicts of the epoch? The question has not been examined, nor the causes of the decline analysed.

In South Africa Gandhiji tried to evolve a social philosophy, and founded an ashram where members owed everything in common. He wrote *Hind Swaraj* and the theory of trusteeship came into being. The experiment came to grief, for individual efforts to do away with the right to property cannot succeed without the sanction of society. The individual right gives place to the collective when the basic economic relation is changed. With the acceptance of trusteeship comes the immutability of the economic structure of society. In short, trusteeship is a negation of social justice without which the modern world would forfeit its claim to being civilized.

Nehru was loyal to Gandhiji but his loyalty owed little to a common philosophy of life. Nehru set no great store by the theory of trus-

teeship. He tried to reconstruct the Indian economy on rational principles and fathered the State sector. He entrusted the task to civil servants who were instruments of repression and of bureaucratic control when Britain ruled. The bureaucrats could not identify themselves with the basic objects of the plans nor did they pay heed to the criticism. National plans can succeed when the people develop a sense of oneness with the things being created. This can be done by releasing the creative energy of the people. The bureaucrats were incapable of carrying out the essential tasks and many projects were lamed. When the Third Plan was launched, the Planning Commission observed: It is evident that the possibilities of full involvement of the people in the processes of change and growth are not being realised to a significant degree.

The author is critical of Nehru's policy of non-alignment. But he does not specify any alternative to non-alignment.

The book contains a number of factual inaccuracies. For instance, "Violence had broken out in a far away village, named Chaurichaura in Bihar." "This he probably did to wean him (Nehru) from impetuous moves like aligning with the Republican Army of Franco." Chaurichaura is a police station in Gorakhpur, Eastern U.P. Franco fought against the Republican Army of Spain.

S. Sarma

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Satyajit Ray's Latest

BY A FILM CRITIC

TREAT it as a pure light comedy, as a sort of Bibhutibhusan Mukherjee's *Barjatri* brought up-to-date, Satyajit Ray's latest film *Aranyer Dinratri* could be moderately enjoyable. But in so enjoying it you might react against the intentions of the film-maker, who presumably sought to project a serious, philosophical approach to life and its problems through his work. But somehow the serious things have not come off at all, while the comic patches, if not always lively, are fairly passable. The story of the four friends holidaying in a forest bungalow and indulging in a bit of soul-searching and self-revelation when they come in contact with the two women of a neighbouring family, told with a cheap pulp-fiction style, is annoyingly ponderous. The point, if any, should have been the pointlessness of our everyday existence, but that has not been given the due attention and wherever there are efforts to build up something of substantial nature the entire thing goes wrong because of the basic uncertainty of attitude. The director seems to be in two minds about the film, whether to make it a hilarious comedy of a holiday mood or, like *Kanchenjunga* and *Nayak*, to collect the characters for a detailed, microscopic observation. The duality of purpose has spoiled the dish and while the comic style is sometimes refreshing, the psychological probe amounts to pretending to face the issue and by doing so really dodging them. Sex has been treated in the typical Sunday-school manner and the director seems too inhibited to interpret sex as a language of communication between human souls when all other channels break down. In this film sex has the usual mediocre treatment, as mere physical relief for a character who has been refused by his girl friend. For him, the Santhal woman whom he seduces is just an

other woman to sleep with, bereft of any emotional bond and this tragedy of non-communication has never been brought to the fore; even the visual rendering of the seduction scene is absolutely ordinary, everything depicted with a cautious, mother-superior type attitude. It is also painful to watch Satyajit's social consciousness operating on an undergraduate level when Sharmila starts wising Soumitra up to the realities round him by mentioning the ailing wife of the dak bungalow chowkidar as a chip on his conscience. The whole scene is done with a text-book kind of stale and out-dated humanism.

The film, of course, has some stretches of Satyajit's pretty adroitness; the brilliant conception of the memory game, the excellent staging of the fair scene, some competent photography and the sparing but effective use of music; but these are small compensations compared to the absolute hollowness of the whole show.

Rabi Ghosh creates some sprightly moments of verbal wit and Subhendu Chatterjee has definitely come of age. Soumitra Chatterjee is dead wood; Sharmila with her atrocious Bengali accent is, coarsely coy; Samit Bhanja and Simi are merely inconsequential. But if this film has anything of lasting value to offer it is the rediscovery of Kaberi Bose. That ingenue of *Raikamal* has now flowered into a mature sophisticated beauty with an alluring contralto, richly endowed with charm, elegance and a delicate, subterranean but powerful sex-appeal which even a bare-bodied Simi has failed to provide. Secretly nursing the silent sorrows of a widow beneath an exterior of gay abandon, she has made herself the personification of Keats' image of melancholy. We sincerely hope this film will not be her last.

Letters

Kerala Despatches

I am amused—though belatedly because of my absence from Delhi for a few weeks—to read the letter (December 20) 'Kerala Despatches' by Mr P. Rajan from Cochin. Without going into details, I still maintain that the feature written by Ramji shows his partisanship. I am not the only person to hold such a view—Mr Tapan Ray Chowdhury, London (October 11, 1969) also angrily remarked, "Sometimes, while reading his reports, I feel in disgust—either Ramji goes or I go."

Mr Rajan questions my bona fides in commenting on his Kerala despatches from my "perch in Delhi." I want to assure Mr Rajan that Delhi is not a perch for us. We are actively associated with peasants and workers here. Delhi or New Delhi is certainly a perch for the followers of Dange and Sundarayya who, sitting in and around Parliament House, forget that the people of Delhi are the worst victims of capitalist and landlord exploitation.

It is a pity that no one has anything to say with regard to some other points which I raised in my previous letter. For instance, the habit of referring to god. According to a newspaper, after taking forcible possession of a CPI office in the District Patiala (Punjab), Marxist communists organized 'Akhand Path' (continuous recitation of Guru Granth Sahib). It is often admitted that religiosity is one of the greatest hindrances to communist movement in our country. Are we prepared to overcome it?

SURAJ SINGH
New Delhi

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Pay Commission

Regarding your comments on the incomplete report of the Pay Commission (January 10), the Chairman of the Commission released to the Press on December 31 three sets of revised pay scales along with a statement containing seven points which refer to the broad outlines of the report. Next morning all the Calcutta newspapers published their own versions of the recommendations. Then somehow the contents of the secret Cabinet note submitted by the Finance Secretary were smuggled into the Press which, as usual, lost no time capitalising on them (Mr Hazra, of course, claims that the Finance Secretary himself divulged the contents).

At first, the dailies as well as the Finance Secretary blamed the Commission for not calculating the total cost of implementation. The same newspapers again worked out estimates varying from Rs 12 crores to Rs 30 crores, one figure being more than double the other! The calculation verges on the point of being macabre.

Then the question of resources. The Commission made it amply clear that in its report it had made a detailed discussion on this point. It would have been only unfortunate if

the Commission had not done so. My Association, whose members are mainly responsible for the collection of more than 50 per cent of the State's total revenue income, submitted a memorandum sometime in 1968 to the Commission and to the Government also in this regard. The memorandum contains some short-term as well as long-term proposals which, if implemented, would raise the State revenue by Rs 55 crores roughly. We don't know yet what the Government has done about these proposals, but it is our firm belief that the Commission must have considered these while suggesting additional resources in its report. Therefore, the question of phasing out the implementation does not arise at all.

You too must have noticed that a section of the Press has been doing everything possible to set the public against the Pay Commission and the Government employees at the same time. In addition to the self-contradictory editorial notes, made-to-order letters are being published daily on this subject. It reminds me of the Rabindra Sarobar hullabaloo. Someone from somewhere is pulling the wires deftly. Let us hope he does not overdo it.

A COMMERCIAL TAX OFFICER,
GRADE II
Calcutta

interests are extracting the price for their help. Look into the affairs of the Durgapur Projects Ltd. and a clear picture will emerge.

S. K. BASU
Durgapur

Winter's Tale

Our deepest sympathies go to those who, shivering in the cold in the swamps or paddy fields of Midnapore or in the arid region of north Bihar, are moving in their own way to re-shape society by awakening the peasants and the tribal communities, while we cityfolk, along with our UF Marxist Ministers, sleep smugly under quilts. Let them know that at least a few in the cities still retain their conscience and are ever ready to extend their helping hand to them.

BIPLAB BOSE
Durgapur

Irony

The difference between the Syndicate and the 'Indicate' is that between the Tories and the Labour Party in Britain. It is ironical when the revisionists and the neo-revisionists vote with Mrs Indira Gandhi, whose strong supporter in Andhra Pradesh is Brahmananda Reddy, whom both the CP(M) and the CPI have charged with killing many political workers in Srikakulam.

M. N. D. NAIR
Trivandrum

Just Out!

EPIC THEATRE

(No. 11)

Collection of Articles by old Masters of the *Bengali Theatre*

Girish Ghosh, D. L. Ray, Dharmadas Sur, Aparesh Mukherjee, Sisir Bhaduri, Satu Sen, Nirmalendu Lahiri and others
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Under The Veil

After disclosures of the source of money for the propaganda conducted by the Bangla Congress against the breakdown of law and order in the State by a person no less than the Vice-President of the party itself, the curtain was drawn down in haste over the month-long drama. The game of Shri Dhara is up, and the myth about the Chief Minister should be demolished. That their Gandhian masks would be torn asunder by their own partymen was a dialectical necessity. Now there should be no doubt that the vested

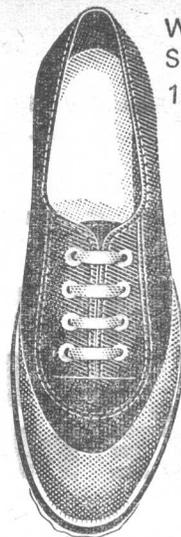
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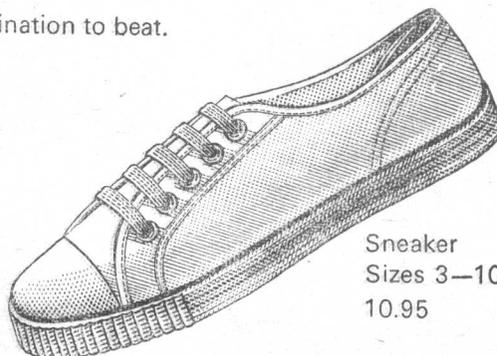
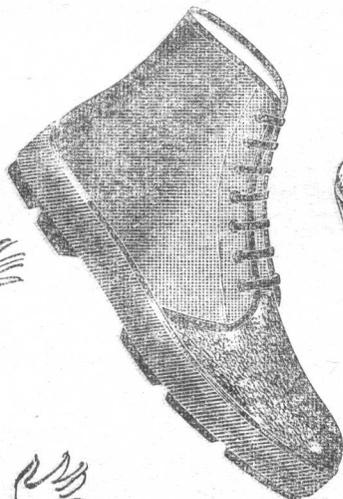
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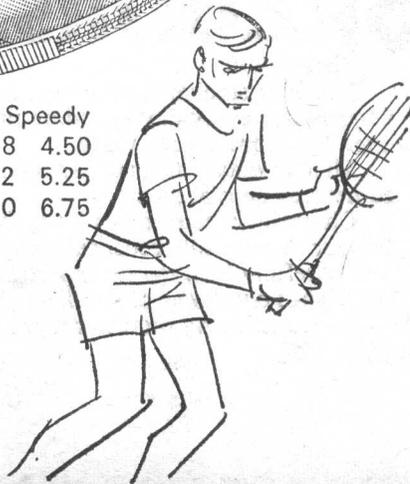
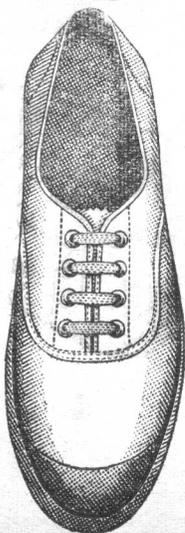
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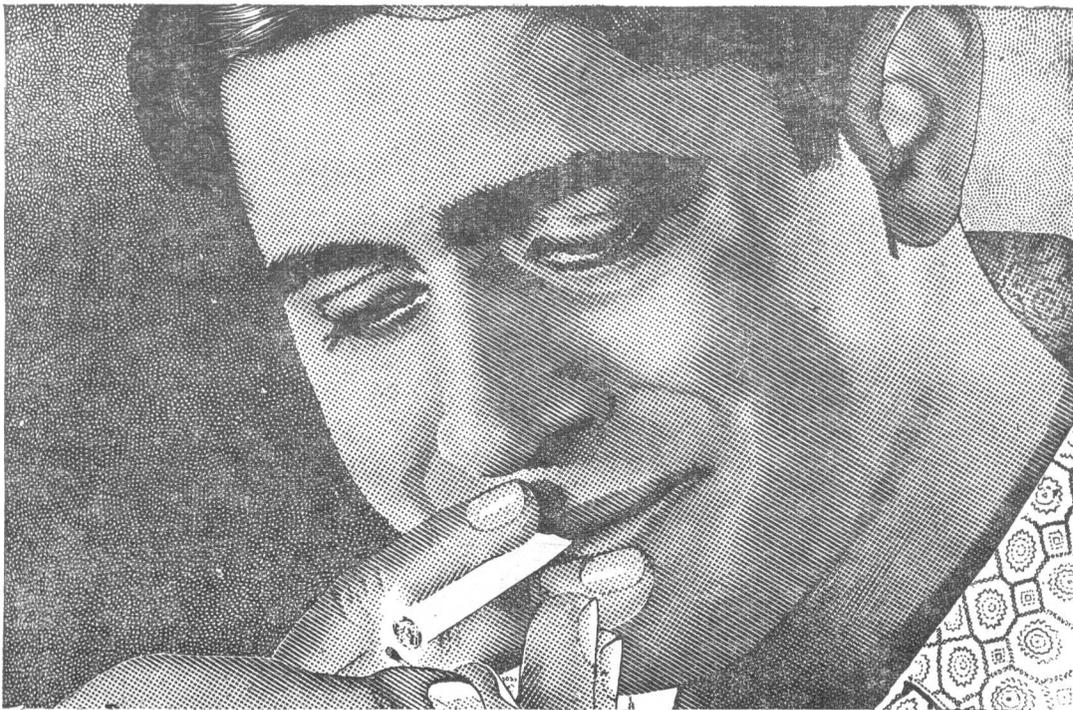


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