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TOUTING FOR CONGRESS

THE United Front is still poised on the precipice despite the partial agreement reached at last Sunday's meeting on how to resolve the crisis. The relations between the parties are so strained that even a minor dispute may take them to the point of no return. The incident before the CPI office immediately after the UF meeting was symbolic; while the leaders made some progress towards evolving a procedure for preserving their beloved Front, two hostile groups clashed on the street below over who was trying to break the Front. There are very few parties in the Front which can legitimately claim innocence in this salacious business, and they hardly count. All the major parties are guilty in varying degrees, though some of them have combined to put the entire onus on the Marxists. In this atmosphere of hatred and vengeance, judgment is warped, and even patent facts are being overlooked to suit the needs of the combatants. There is no reason why the Home department should be blamed for the failure of the police to prevent the incident in the Assembly corridors in which the Chief Minister was alleged to have been manhandled. The police in the Assembly building are not under Mr Jyoti Basu; they are under the Speaker, and any grievance against them has to be made to Mr Bijoy Banerjee. Similarly, Mr Ajoy Mukherjee may be Chief Minister, but on the Assembly precincts he cannot order the police to throw anyone out, though it may strike him as an afterthought that his precious life was in danger.

Those who used the incident as a stick to beat the CPM with could not have been unaware of the position. They pounced on it on extraneous considerations; it provided them an occasion to show on the floor of the Assembly their hostility to the CPM which must have gladdened the like-minded in the Opposition. They felt no qualms that they were, in effect, speaking in support of the censure motion tabled by the Congress. The Bangla Congress Ministers have gone further and expressed their desire to resign rather than continue in the same Ministry with the CPM. The MLAs of the party are also reported to be of the same view, though they have not yet put it in writing. All these antics were evidently designed to prepare the ground for Mr Sushil Dhara's talks in New Delhi with the leaders of the ruling Congress about a mini-front Ministry in West Bengal. The ostensible purpose of Mr Dhara's visit was to discuss

with the Centre matters connected with the Durgapur Projects of which as Commerce and Industry Minister he is in charge. In New Delhi he did not say anything about his department but spoke instead of the state of affairs in West Bengal. It would appear his mission was entirely political and any discussion that he might have had in New Delhi on Durgapur Projects was for enabling him to travel at government expense.

In the UF meeting Mr Dhara was reported to have said he was not prepared to wait for even fifteen minutes. He can afford to be impatient, for his leader heads the Ministry and, as such, can wreck the so-called UF in a trice. If he has not done it already the reason is not that he is keen to maintain the Front; he is waiting for a signal from other parties with which he can form an alternative coalition. For one reason or another these parties are not yet ready; they are dithering. So also is the ruling Congress. It is said the CPI wanted to delay the toppling till Mr Biswanath Mukherjee has been safely returned to the Assembly with 14-party support. With Sant Fateh Singh threatening self-immolation, the Prime Minister may not like trouble in West Bengal. Mr Mukherjee may have proved himself a little amenable, but not Mr Dhara who is trying to bring as much pressure on his leader as possible for immediate action. Mr Mukherjee's resignation will force other partners of the mini-front to coalesce, for Mr Dhara knows well that they cannot opt for either a CPM-led Ministry or another mid-term poll.

To discipline Mr Dhara is not difficult; he will lose all his abusive eloquence if other major parties make it clear to him that they would have nothing to do with a Congress-supported Ministry. But they have not done it. Mr Dhara is openly plotting against the UF and touting for a return of the Congress; yet he is being tolerated—and even encouraged. Mr Dhara's party may glory in being a tail of the Congress, but should the others allow themselves to be enticed in spite of their antipathy

to the CPM? In their own interest they should put Mr Dhara in his place; otherwise they will be forced to become camp-followers of the Congress and share its fate ultimately.

Since these lines were written and set, Mr Jyoti Basu and Mr Sundarayya have also been to Delhi to probe the intentions of the Central Government regarding West Bengal and the central leaders have been sweet and reasonable. Millions of

unmitigated Marxists in West Bengal will no doubt go into rejoicing over this confrontation. Mr Dhara will pull a longer face than usual. It will now be the turn of the CPI to send a political mission to the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, the class struggle has again been intensified in Calcutta and elsewhere in West Bengal and the number of martyrs is going up. However, it looks as if the UF will be maintained—West Bengal is not Kerala, thanks to Mrs Gandhi: So let us all prepare for celebration of Shri Panchami.

Oily Ultimatum

The three foreign oil companies which have been given an ultimatum to reduce their crude prices may in all possibility comply with the Governmental requirement. When it is a question of fat profit, business always gets precedence over dignity. But whether they comply or not is not the only interesting point to watch. More fascinating is the reaction of the national bourgeoisie to Mr Triguna Sen's 'stern' order on the three companies. Especially the reaction of the CPI. The way it frothed and nailed the ultimatum may lead one to imagine that the operations of Burmah Shell, Esso and Caltex form the weakest link of imperialism in India and Mr Triguna Sen has pierced it well and good. The fight against imperialism has started, says the CPI. Let it enjoy its fight peacefully.

The three companies, all together, have the licence to refine 4.4 million tonnes of crude; but they have been allowed to expand the capacity to 7.25 million, because the country needs it. If the companies decide not to abide by Mr Sen's ultimatum, 20 per cent of their foreign exchange allocation for crude oil imports will be cut. Twenty per cent of what? Of 7.25 million or of 4.4 million? Moreover, the companies will be ordered to go back to their licensed capacity. That is, the companies will be producing 3.52 million tonnes. How

does Mr Sen propose to make good the deficiency of these 3.73 million? Maybe he has secured an alternative source. He has not disclosed which source and what the terms of agreement are. If he has honestly secured the arrangement, it must be wholly in favour of India. If he has, what is the point of the ultimatum? Why doesn't he straightaway order the companies to return to their licensed capacity?

It is obvious from the tongue-in-cheek ultimatum that there is a hitch somewhere in what has been projected as a well-oiled threat. And that is nothing new in this oily business in India. A Belgian company and later an American company offered cheaper crude last year. They were refused, even though the international price of the crude was falling and the foreign-based Indian companies stuck to their old higher prices. Mr Sen did not even care to use that offered crude at cheaper prices in the public sector refineries in Cochin and Madras. Moreover, the refinery at Madras accepted crude from the Philips Petroleum in Iran at \$1.35 a barrel when its international price was \$1.24. It is strange that the anomaly is now sought to be explained away by stating that it was a part of a package deal.

If Mr Sen is so valiant a fighter against imperialism, let him scrap the scandalous 1951 and 1953 refinery

agreements. Last year the Shantilal Shah Committee recommended formation of a national oil commission and revision of the old oil agreements. Let Mr Sen unearth the Committee report from the garbage of various commission reports. Before he threatens to force the foreign companies to use Indian crude, let him first find out from where he would get the crude. India produces only 40 percent of the

crude required for the country.

His Ministry people knew it better. They raised hell when the talk of nationalisation of imports was aired at the Bombay session of the ruling Congress. The slogan was too hot. How can it nationalise imports without scrapping agreements, entered here, there and everywhere, through which the Congress invited foreign investors to make refined humans out of crude Indians?

The Divided Socialists

Divisibility is a generic virtue of all Indian political parties. Even so, the current travails of what still passes for the Samyukta Socialist Party do call for some special comment. Since Mrs Gandhi let herself loose in July of last year, the Samyukta Socialists have been busy splitting themselves several ways. As of this moment, the party has come apart in West Bengal, and it will need a miracle to again join together what subjective animosities have sundered so rudely. In Bihar, the SSP's projected alliance with the Syndicate and the Jana Sangh does not appear to have even the faintest potential of fruit-bearing, and one consequence which now seems more than likely is a split down the middle between those who want to down Mrs Indira Gandhi by hook or by crook and those others who believe that the theory of political equi-distance deserves a somewhat more neutral application. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh Mr Raj Narain's ardour to place his considerable corpus athwart the Prime Minister's ambitions has led the SSP to enter into an arrangement which would underwrite the survival of the erstwhile reactionary, Shri Chandra Bhanu Gupta: an arrangement which has stirred the National Chairman of the party, Shri S. M. Joshi, into thinking in terms of resignation, which, unless a patchwork of a compromise intervenes, may come any day.

After Lohia, it is therefore going to be disintegration for the party,

and soon. The catalytic charisma of just one man had brought together several disparate people under the common banner of a queer sort of socialism; with that individual dead and gone, centrifugism is now running riot. But perhaps the fault lay in Lohia himself, and in the manner of his political operations. A feel for the masses may be a necessary condition for militant socialism, but not a sufficient one: there is something extra that is called for, never mind whether it is described as consistency in political behaviour or allergy to even temporary understanding with rabid social enemies. Similarly, a pathological hatred for the Nehru family could be a useful starting base for assembling, at short notice, a wide range of severally disgruntled people, but as time threatens to creak to a stop, the hurlers of the subjective invectives of yesterday turn into the crashing bores of today. With Lohia removed from the scene, the Samyukta Socialists are discovering to their chagrin that the magic of hard-hitting abuse and sustained character assassination does not any more force open the door to success.

Perhaps because the anti-Indira Gandhi crusade by itself is not clicking so well, the SSP leaders are fast changing over from the strategy of aiming with the rifle to one of spraving with a shot-gun. Additional targets are being set up; the CPI (M), in particular, has been, in recent months, at the receiving end

of a sustained attack mounted by the tacticians of the Samyukta Socialists. The strident anti-communism which of late the SSP leaders are voicing has little relevance to the party's central objective of dislodging the Prime Minister. But in such matters, logical coherence usually takes a back seat. Besides, name-calling as a pastime has a way of becoming habit-forming: it is the insensate passion to run anybody, just anybody, down which becomes the principal emotion and the worthiness of the victim is not subjected to any post mortem. So it is with the SSP. Social democracy beyond a point discovers affinities with social fascism. How this comes about ought to be a fascinating topic for study; and the SSP could provide rich source material for an empirical investigation.

Triangular Talks

The Sino-Soviet talks in Peking seem to be getting nowhere: ominous reports of war preparations are again giving rise to varied speculation. The reports themselves may be speculative, even totally fabricated for propaganda purposes. But there is nothing to suggest that a settlement of the border question, not to speak of a wider political understanding, is anywhere in sight. Meanwhile, Moscow and Washington have long discovered several major areas in which their interests are similar, if not identical. The first round of the arms limitation talks was marked by much cordiality. More substantive negotiations are soon to begin; these may not slow down the arms race, but can still result in mutual agreement on how to conduct the race hereafter. And now some diplomatic contacts have been resumed also between the Americans and the Chinese. Does this mean that Peking is beginning to take the same line towards Washington as Moscow has done for quite some time?

It would be extremely superficial to see a similarity between the two. Moscow, of course, would like the

world to believe that it is with the Chinese that Washington will eventually form an alliance in opposition to the revolutionary Russians and their fraternal peoples. Even without falling for this propaganda line, some people may be led to believe that, while Peking and Moscow go on quarrelling with increasing bitterness, both are seeking separate but similar compromises with Washington. But what is the basis for such a conclusion? That the Sino-American ambassador-level meetings in Warsaw have been resumed? But they were held for nearly 13 years before being broken off two years ago—without the two countries coming closer to each other in any way. More than 130 meetings were held, but the Americans remained as hostile to China as they had been before the talks started and the Chinese as firm as ever in their opposition to the American system as such and American policies in different parts of the world. Why should either side suddenly change merely because some diplomatic contacts have been renewed in remote Warsaw? Those who expected a sudden reversal of postures and policies may be already a little disappointed that the 135th meeting on January 20 made no difference, nor even result in prompt and firm arrangements for further exchanges.

More meetings will, of course, be held; but, primarily, each side will be engaged in testing the other's intentions. There is a basic difference between such mutual assessments and a mutual groping, on the basis of certain common interests, for agreed systems to protect these interests. Such a community of Sino-American interests is not discernible; all that can, therefore, be aimed at is some possible reduction of the points of friction, of the areas where the conflicting interests are in danger of coming into open collision. But even in this limited exercise not many substantial results are likely in the immediate future. Conceivably, there could be some flexibility in trade relations and in cultural and other contacts. But there can be no com-

promise between Chinese support for revolutionary struggles, such as in Vietnam, and the U.S. aggression against peoples engaged in this fight. Nor can the Chinese dilute, let alone abandon, their demand for Taiwan's unification with the People's Republic of China. Whether Washington will go back on their commitment not to let this happen is a subject of some current speculation, but there is certainly no immediate possibility. All that has happened, therefore, is the introduction of a little more flexibility without any change in basic positions. Still, it is rather remarkable that, while even Washington can allow itself a less inflexible approach, New Delhi's China policy remains frozen where it was eight winters ago.

As The Romans Do

The utter hollowness of parliamentary politics in Italy has been brought to the surface by the former partners of the centre-left coalition Government vying for entry into the corridors of power. All sorts of permutations and combinations are being worked out for possible pairing of parties in any future coalition. The Italian Communist Party, which is growing from strength to strength so far as opinion poll reports go, has been treading a cautious line to show people that it accepts as virtue the rules of the parliamentary game. Committed to achieving power through elections, Signor Longo's party kept its cadres in effective check during the hot autumn. By displaying unusual restraint in organising demonstrations, the communists seem to be concentrating on improving their election prospects. Perhaps they will have to wait for some more time before taking the initiative in forming a coalition government. The immediate provocation for dissension in the party and the consequent spillover to the Maoist ranks is to be found in the communists' search of interlocuters among the Christian Democrats and others. A few days ago the party's Central Committee suspended two of its members—Ros-

sana Rosanda and Aldo Natoli—and Luigi Pintor, MP, for publishing *Il Manifesto* which condemned Russia as well as the communist parties which sought refuge in parliamentary politics. Signor Longo is ready to lend qualified support to a two-party coalition between the Christian Democratic Party and the PSI for evolving a programme of domestic reforms. But why should Signor Rumor or the Socialists agree to an arrangement which will give a share of the credit for any success of the coalition to the communists? A left-wing coalition is not on the cards as the so-called moderate section of the Socialists is opposed to coming to any terms with the Communist Party and Proletarian Unity. Although it sounds incredible, the Romans may again be presented with a house of cards that the centre-left coalition is.

In Italy who is not afraid of a fresh general election? Signor Rumor fears that the communists would return from a fresh poll with increased strength at the cost of the Socialists and Social Democrats, if not his own party. This would polarise politics between the Christian Democrats and the communists making it impossible to form a centre-left coalition. On the other hand, Signor Longo has his own troubles in coping with the rising dissent in the party ranks. In any case, the caretaker Government of Rumor will continue till the municipal, provincial and regional elections in April. The main point of interest in these elections will be the performance of the communists, since this will have a decisive impact on the basis of any future coalition. The PSI is a divided house with Nenni's prescription of getting back into the Government falling on the deaf ears of other faction leaders. Moreover, the Social Democrats have dropped a hint of forming a coalition with the Christian Democrats and the Liberals. The conservative elements, including Rumor, are taking full advantage of the political confusion to cloud the main issues. The Prime Minister has also given a long hand to the police to continue the physical and political lynching of all progressive elements.

JANUARY 31, 1970

Dummy Manoeuvres

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

AD hoc politics always leads to ad hoc economics. However much Mrs Indira Gandhi might like to avoid it, a mid-term election to the Lok Sabha looks a near certainty before 1970 is out. Any ruling party has to buy its peace with Big Business in such a situation. Mr S. A. Dange and his party might like to believe that the concessions to Birlas over the Goa fertiliser plant do not represent a major policy deviation but only a "right manoeuvre", but it is little short of a sell-out because the Birlas hold a mere 16 per cent in terms of investment and the rest is foreign capital from the United States Steel Corporation routed through an innocuous-looking subsidiary. The claim that the management would be entirely with the Birlas hardly camouflages the fact that U.S. private capital has entered a vital sector in a big way.

The political explanation offered for this manoeuvre is bizarre. Mrs Gandhi is not sure of leftist support yet. The SSP has made it its sole philosophy to denigrate her and her family and to topple her. The CPI(M)'s support cannot be taken for granted even if Mrs Gandhi tried hard during last week to convince Mr E. M. S. Nambudiripad that she had nothing to do with toppling his ministry. The CPI's support is neither adequate nor decisive and even the DMK cannot be relied upon on an issue like the partition of Chandigarh. So to be a good leftist, Mrs Gandhi has to give concessions to Big Business and raise funds to lead her party to a smashing victory at a mid-term poll. So, it would seem the only cure for her anti-leftism is greater and more consistent support from the parties of the left! Left to herself Mrs Gandhi would have been a centrist, to go by the latest Soviet assessments. But she

happens to be a little to the left of self-interest and the CPI would have to keep up steady pressure to ensure that the present stance does not change.

Thinking on a mid-term election is no doubt divided among her supporters. She would like to announce a package of populist measures as part of the budget and have Parliament dissolved in March or April even before the budget session had run its normal course. Her advisers think that with a populist halo round her and an early election thereafter would give her anything up to 180 Lok Sabha seats depending on the pattern of alliances or electoral deals she is out to strike. But Mr Y. B. Chavan is among those who want to go about it a little cautiously. As it is, the Parliamentary Board is weighted in her favour and the Central Election Committee to be constituted by expanding the Board would reflect the same factional balance. Mrs Gandhi has of late been trying to undermine Mr Chavan's position in Maharashtra and an early election would go against his interests.

So if the Lok Sabha is not dissolved in March-April, it would be in October-November so that the polls take place early next year. Even Mr Morarji Desai talks of a possible dissolution of Parliament by October and not immediately. Mr Kamaraj is campaigning for a mid-term poll. Everything points to continuing instability at the Centre.

The outcome of the showdown in Uttar Pradesh would prove decisive because the Prime Minister's camp has made it an issue of life and death. Regaining Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are crucial components in Mrs Gandhi's strategy but everything may not go according to her calculations. The budget will decide her fate. As the exercises are proceeding, it is becom-

ing clear that she cannot avoid a heavy dose of taxation which means she cannot carry the entire left with her. The dramatic realignments over the Chandigarh issue should have convinced her that she cannot push anything through Parliament without a degree of consensus on issues. The Preventive Detention Act fell through as Central legislation because the left could not have supported any Bill for its extension. The plan to partition Chandigarh had been worked out in all its details but the DMK virtually vetoed it. The manoeuvrability of a compact regional party with a strategic contingent of 25 MPs is immense in the Lok Sabha. The DMK-Akali axis could scuttle the partition plan. Mrs Gandhi went back on the partition formula not so much due to Akali threats or pressure but because a Bill on it might have been defeated in the Lok Sabha and she would have had to resign following the defeat.

Even if the Chandigarh issue is solved before the budget session begins, Mrs Gandhi's chances of survival would not improve unless the SSP and the CPI(M) settle for another phase of opportunism of opposition to the ruling party at the Centre but not to the point of overthrowing the government. But once a mid-term poll becomes imminent, the survival instinct would force several MPs now on the bandwagon to reconsider their affiliation. When it comes to seeking re-election every MP now on her side would have to reassess his chances. It depends on which Congress has stronger allies in his constituency. A subjective factor would decide the issue and not ideology. It is possible that the Syndicate would succeed in knocking together a compact of the SSP, the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh openly and possibly with the CPI(M) indirectly. It would mean the revival of pre-1967 anti-Congressism in a new form and it could always be dialectically rationalised by the CPI(M) that the Organisation Congress, to the extent it is anti-Congress at the Centre, should be deemed a potentially left force.

January 25, 1970

CRP-RAJ

RAMJI

'SECURITY', 'law and order' and kindred attributes stemming from these two bedrock values by which vested interests swear highlight the spirit and style of administration of the mini-front Ministry led by the CPI. Fulsome acknowledgment of these qualities pours in from all quarters. Locally, the two most popular English dailies, *The Indian Express* and *The Hindu*, and almost all the big and small Malayalam dailies, concentrate on conjuring up a paper-millennium that has dawned on Kerala, thanks to the mini-front Ministry. With skilful slant, suppression and distortion of those facts which give the lie to their pre-determined notions, these newspapers sell the Ministry to the public, most sedulously. Also the leading lights of various categories and persuasions diligently promote this image-building exercise. A shining example of this was provided by Dr George Thomas, leader of the Congress Syndicate group in the Kerala Assembly. Rallying to the defence of the Ministry, against a motion by the Marxists, he gave a pithy and highly illuminating assessment of the regime when he compared it favourably with the Congress ministries of Mr R. Shankar and Mr Panampilly Govinda Menon and with that of the Congress-supported minority Ministry of Mr Pattom Thanu Pillai, the then PSP leader. This compliment, coming from a most inveterate anti-communist worthy, was high praise indeed for the CPI-led Ministry and in a great measure it is an index of the developing character of the CPI that this compliment was accepted gratefully and along with it the support of the Congress—both wings of it. Actually, this saved the Ministry and enabled it to get a clear majority when the Assembly met early this month for the first time after the new Ministry had assumed charge.

With their majority established thus, the Chief Minister, Mr Achutha Menon, had no need to recall his original categorical statement, when he assumed charge as the head of a minority group, that he would step down from office the moment it was proved that he owed his majority to Congress support. The nine-strong Congress membership in the Assembly has become a balancing factor and the Ministry's life depends upon this. The five-strong Syndicate and the four-member Indicate, are with the mini-front Ministry. Fortunately for the CPI, there is no need to stretch its ideology for accepting support from the Congress, even from the Syndicate wing of it, since, by teaming up with the arch-reactionary Kerala Congress of undiluted vested interests, it has proved that both its ideology and techniques could very easily cover the less reactionary Syndicate Congress.

All these ruling parties swear by 'law and order' and 'security' and these the Ministry is providing in ample measure through its sword arm, the CRP. The Chief Minister and his Government swear by the CRP now. The whole State is infested with the CRP who may be seen in extra strength in the rice-growing areas of Kuttanad, Palghat and Trichur districts. To any visitor to these rustic areas, it would seem that there is an all-pervading state of emergency. The CRP men run riot in the countryside, raiding the houses of peasants and agricultural workers, molesting women, manhandling men, pulling down huts. True, the values of security, law and order and elementary personal freedom, are not meant for the miserable underdogs, who are all suspected pro-Marxists. The provocation for all this widespread police zoolum among the have-nots is the alleged land grab plan of the Marxists, under which they try to implement the provisions of the Land Reform laws which still remain on paper, awaiting implementation by the bureaucracy. The notorious police raj of Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer has been easily overshadowed by the CRP-Raj of the

mini-front Ministry. Side by side with the CRP, goondas organised by the Kerala Congress and the CPI local leadership are on active duty to root out Marxist party sympathy through intimidation and brute force. The score of murdered and badly battered Marxist party workers and sympathisers is mounting steadily. Torture inside lock-ups, which used to be an outstanding feature of the tyrannical regime of Sir C. P., has come back. All those who are not for the mini-front are against it, is the assumption behind the terrorist tactics of the non-official goonda armies and the official CRP force. Side by side with this, there is an organised attempt to deprive traditional agricultural workers, suspected of Marxist sympathy, of their accustomed and legitimate work. Black legs have a field day thanks to the ready support of the CRP, always on tap for landlords. Mostly they manage with their black-leg forces, with the CRP giving cover for their operations. Daylight murders provoke no action from police authorities, provided the victim is a Marxist or Marxist sympathiser. It is very much reminiscent of Indonesian conditions under Suharto. But this is Law and Order.

Attempt on Koya

There was an outcry by all sections when Marar, well known for his cranky ways and independent style of activity, made an attempt on the life of the Home Minister, Mr Md. Koya, in a very ineffective manner. Twice before this Marar had secured the limelight—once with an open attack of the ISP leader, Mr P. R. Kurup, and another time with his stoning of the Governor's car. However, this time Marar's independent action was pictured as part of the master plan of the Marxist party. As for Marar, under instructions from the top, it is learnt, he has been battered beyond hope of recovery by the police, inside the lock-up. While horror and indignation was spouted over the attack on the Home Minister, it is significant that no such reaction was triggered when an attempt was made

recently on the life of Mrs K. R. Gouri, the Marxist leader and ex-Minister, by a pack of goondas who waylaid her car and nearly succeeded in doing her in. However, she escaped.

In the bitter struggle that is going on between the Marxists and their following and the mini-front and their following, plus official machinery and authority, the Marxists are now fighting with their backs to the

wall. The gains under the campaign to implement land reforms through popular action have been easily counterbalanced by the losses sustained by the Marxists and their following by way of life, of property, of work and of security to life and limb and primary freedoms to move about or to assemble. The mini-front Ministry is, in this respect, sitting pretty, making the most of a tenure in power which, if Congress support is forthcoming, will stay on.

A Sick State

ARUN KUMAR CHAKMA

TRIPURA was once known as the hot-bed of revolutionary activities. Veteran communist leaders like Messrs Dasarath Deb Barma and Biren Datta were household names in those days. But the credibility gap between the promise and performance of the party to which they belong, that is the CP(M), is so wide today that nobody except the most gullible or demagogue-prone would believe that Tripura is still the same. Those who kindled the revolutionary flame have taken a leap in the dark, using election strategy at a time when the climate of political, economic and cultural repression is stifling, insecurity rife, and people are chest-deep in misery.

Every day small groups of young and old men, students and job-seekers, come out on the streets voicing serious allegations against the ruling clique and crying for jobs. They are joined by retrenched and victimised government employees who curse notorious bureaucrats. Peasants and refugees from rural areas come and go in processions complaining of their sub-human standards of living. In the far-flung villages poor peasants and landless agricultural labourers are restless and ready for any action if only somebody would show them the path to liberation from the feudal exploitation. Every day and night a huge herd of human animals, rag-

ged and all emaciated, roam about the lanes and bye-lanes in search of food. Patients come back from hospitals frustrated, sometimes because there is no vacant bed, sometimes because they have no one to plead their cases, and die unnoticed. Conflicting loyalties, frustrations and pressures scream against one another. Students who fail at examinations go in for organised rowdyism against the teachers, posing as 'Naxalites', while the teachers, in their turn, let loose their dogs against them.

Yes, there is a spontaneous outburst of protests everywhere, but, also, these are used by a self-perpetuating clique. Movements end in confusion and complete isolation. People grope in the dark, not knowing where they go. The impression the sporadic and periodic outbursts generally leave is that the people are in revolt not against a particular system but a few individuals. Tempted by the intellectual swing to the so-called Left and the glamour attached to it, most of the activists, generally drawn from the white-collar middle class, push forward to the romantic fringe of politics without any serious conviction, without any serious organisational outlook. They are the ones who hate the Establishment but at the same time crave the privilege of being in the Establish-

ment. If they have learnt anything all these years it is how to shine on the political or cultural scene without the risk of having to lose anything.

They are not to blame, when unblushing opportunism marks the leadership. The leadership has reduced them to the level of mere acolytes and trained them, in most cases, to a sectarian paranoia which often manifests itself in most shameful aberrations. This, of course, matters little when the battle the leftists leaders wage is not for any revolutionary change but just a sphere of influence. No wonder that the Establishment laughs at the 'disarray' of the new Left whose doctrinal differences are no more than a smokescreen for personal ambitions.

All ideological distinctions are getting blurred and the political parties, be it the CPI or CP(M), the ruling Congress or the Anand Marg, seem to find themselves facing each other from the same platform united by a common slogan 'Inquilab Zindabad.' That the CP(M) is capable of outmanoeuvring all in this game was evident from the recent peasants' march it organised. The peasants who walked hundreds of miles gave a demonstration indeed of their capacity to withstand unlimited physical strain. They walked all the way from the distant interiors to the capital, Agartala, to voice their demands. They were all hungry, exhausted almost to the point of collapse, but still raised slogans, half-pronounced, half-understood. But to the townsmen they presented an amusing spectacle. All, including the local CP(M) workers, watched this two-mile-long procession gleefully with an air of aloofness. There was no feeling of identification.

When the whole leftist movement in Tripura is so disorganised Mr Sachindra Lal Singh and his henchmen have very little to fear. The zest which both the CP(M) and CPI have been exploiting the domestic issues is no match for the capacity of the ruling Congress to reverse the whole process, be it by breaking open ballot boxes or em-

ploying some other method. The inter-party feud which shook the ruling Congress for some days culminating in threats and counter-threats could not weaken Mr Singh's position in any way. The showdown at the Centre no doubt provided the recalcitrant Congressmen with an opportunity to hot up the climate with renewed vigour, but to no avail. Even when they branded him as pro-Syndicate, Mr Singh was not much embarrassed. True, this caused him a temporary discomfiture, especially

when the leftist parties discovered in the recalcitrants some 'progressive' elements, but this too he could overcome within a very short period. Ultimately he could make them all agree to bury the hatchet. In the meantime, Mrs Indira Gandhi visited Tripura and uttered a heap of brave words, much to the satisfaction of the ruling Congress and much to the chagrin of the leftists, creating a climate in which the leftist parties will find it very hard to win the rat race for power.

"all progressives—the communists, the left elements in the Congress and the Muslim League". However, immediately after the transfer of power, the "left" elements in the party leadership, banking on the famous Zhdanov report to the inaugural meeting of the Cominform, forced a radical shift in the communist policy. Ultimately these 'left' elements under B. T. Ranadive won out at the Second Congress of the party and called for a one-stage revolution to be achieved through a people's democratic front of the working class, the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie led by the working class. Moreover, according to Ranadive, the revolution was to begin with the armed uprising of the urban proletariat and the peasantry was to have a secondary role. From this dangerously oversimplified theoretical line of one-stage revolution relying on urban insurrection it was but a short step to rank sectarianism in practice. Thus after the Second Congress the party went on launching a wave of strikes in urban areas and tried to convert every partial strike into a general strike. The party indulged in all sorts of acts that progressively isolated it from the people. "The Ranadive line", writes the author not without reason, "had virtually broken up the trade unions the CPI had been controlling. The peasant movement did not exist in most parts of the country. Other mass fronts stood paralyzed under the Government's sledge-hammer blows. Morale in the party had sunk low and functionaries in the jails were vacillating while dissenters outside were being expelled right and left denounced as traitors."

Meanwhile, independently of right capitulationism and 'left' adventurism and fighting against both in practice, had developed over a vast area in Telengana, a great armed agrarian movement against feudalism led by the Andhra leadership of the party. It had started already in 1946 and was developing from strength to strength. Several thousand villages had been liberated where people's governments, people's militia

Book Review

Indian Communism

MONITOR

THE Communist Party of India, almost from its very inception, looked to the West and the latter's more or less 'classical' proletarian revolution as its own model. For a long time the party, directed from Moscow and London and led by mostly middle-class intellectuals *non-integrated with the masses*, was incapable of applying the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism to the specific conditions of India. It was only after 1946 that any section of the CPI came close to creatively applying Marxism-Leninism to Indian reality. This was the case in Telengana where the Andhra leadership of the party successfully led the peasantry in its armed struggle against feudalism and imperialism. It was in fact the application, to specific Indian conditions, of the Marxist anti-feudal and anti-imperialist strategy along with the Maoist tactic of peasant guerilla warfare. Thus it was one of the first applications of Mao's thought outside China even before the first stage—that is, the democratic stage—of the Chinese Revolution itself was completed.

As a matter of fact for almost five years, between 1946 and 1951 Mao's thought was being certainly applied by the Andhra leadership of the CPI

over a vast area of Telengana. This revolutionary struggle, as shown by Mohan Ram in his book* pretty convincingly, was subsequently suppressed conjointly by the national and the international leaderships of the communist movement. But with the second split—the first real split—in the Indian communist movement beginning with the Naxalbari peasant uprising in 1967 Mao's Thought—that is, the revolutionary line—has returned to the Indian communist movement.

The book under review traces, on the basis of a wealth of data and documents not easily available elsewhere, the tortuous path the movement has been following for the last two decades. As such it is an extremely valuable work and should be compulsory reading for all militants.

At the hour of the transfer of power the CPI, under P. C. Joshi, practically capitulated to the Indian bourgeoisie by pledging unqualified support to the Nehru leadership and calling for a national front with

*Indian Communism—Split Within a Split

By Mohan Ram

Vikas Publications : Rs 27-50

and people's courts were functioning. The *Andhra Letter* of 1946—issued by the Andhra leadership—identified feudalism and imperialism as the main enemies and the stage of the revolution that was unfolding as the “new democratic stage” distinct from the proletarian stage. In Mao Tse-tung's *New Democracy* (1944) it saw “a new form of revolutionary struggle to advance towards socialism in colonies and semi-colonies” and noted that “the perspective is likely not that of general strikes and general uprising leading to the liberation of the rural sides but the dogged resistance and prolonged civil war in the form of an agrarian revolution culminating in the capture of political power.” Thus the Andhra section of the party had the honour of being one of the first segments of the international working class movement to apply Mao's thought in practice.

Attack on Mao

The Ranadive leadership while paying lip service to Telengana did not and could not support it in practice, wedded as it was to the line of one-stage revolution through urban uprising. Its opposition to the Andhra line was crystallized in four documents brought out by the ruling Politbureau in 1948 (published in *Communist* in January, February and June-July, 1949). The Politbureau, in these documents, held that imperialism had been virtually eliminated from India and that the democratic revolution, practically over, was almost to pass on to the socialist revolution. Capitalism was the main enemy in India in both urban and rural areas and the rich peasants in the village had the same role as the bourgeoisie in the city and both had to be fought. The urban proletariat that was to lead the revolution had only the landless and poor peasants as its firm allies. The middle peasants and even the petty bourgeoisie were at best vacillating allies of the revolution. The Andhra unit's strategy of relying on the peasantry was dubbed a “shame-faced theory of class collaboration” stem-

ming from a “reformist conception of class relations” clothed in “left phraseology about Telengana,” thus betraying an “anti-party, anti-Leninist” outlook. The whole discussion culminated in an attack on Mao Tse-tung. The Andhra leadership had asserted that “Mao, the leader of the historic Chinese liberation struggle has formulated a theory of new democracy. This is a new form of struggle to advance towards socialism in colonies and semi-colonies.” Ranadive joined the issue straightaway by holding that the CPI had accepted only Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin as the authoritative source of Marxism and not any other source. So there was no question of “the so-called theory of new democracy alleged to be propounded by Mao” as a “new addition to Marxism.” By opposing Mao's line to the line of the Soviet Party he asserted that some of Mao's formulations are such that no Communist Party can accept them; they are in contradiction to the world understanding of the Communist parties”. Mohan Ram thinks that this attack on Mao, delivered a few months before the liberation of China, might not have been totally opposed by Moscow which was eager for international conformism to its own line.

Later the intervention of the international communist movement against the Ranadive line came through the famous Cominform editorial of January 17, 1950. The editorial basically endorsed the Maoist line, in the context of colonies and semi-colonies, of forging the broadest possible front under working class leadership against imperialism. However, interestingly enough, in the list it gave of the countries where armed struggle was going on there was no mention of India in spite of the reality of Telengana. In the light of later history this looks like the first salvo of the international communist leadership—dominated by Moscow—against the continuation of armed struggle in India. Later the intervention took a more brazen form. In the changed conditions of cold

war when Nehru's foreign policy was showing signs of non-alignment Moscow thought it necessary and convenient to advise the CPI, in the interest of its foreign policy, to placate the Nehru Government. The intervention was first made indirectly through the CP of Great Britain whose leadership suggested in a letter to the CPI to utilize all legal opportunities and prepare for general elections. It was followed by R. Palme Dutt's personal directive to the party not to follow the path of armed struggle, at least in the immediate future, but to forge a broad democratic front in favour of the world peace movement. The climax was reached when a party delegation went to seek Moscow's advice early in 1951, met the Soviet leadership consisting of Stalin, Suslov, Molotov and Malenkov and drafted the 1951 *Draft Programme and Statement of Policy* both of which were promptly published by the Cominform journal, unlike any other previous CPI document. The new policy while rejecting the Russian path for the Indian revolution also noted the following, “the thesis was put forward that since ours is a semi-colony like China our revolution would develop in the same way as in China with partisan warfare as its main weapon . . . but peasant struggles along the Chinese path alone cannot lead to victory in India”. In other words, the new policy, while rejecting the Russian and the Chinese paths, tried in fact to rationalize the abandonment of armed struggle for the Indian revolutionary movement. The upshot was that in October, 1951, A. K. Gopalan, on behalf of the Central Committee announced the withdrawal of the Telengana struggle and advised “the Telengana peasantry and the fighting partisans to stop all partisan activities” and to mobilize the entire people to rout the Congress at the polls, thus paving the way to parliamentarism and ‘peaceful’ transition to socialism.

“Peaceful Transition”

Once armed struggle was given up the CPI leadership had also to fol-

low mechanically Moscow's overall foreign policy interests in characterizing America and not British imperialism as the main enemy of the Indian people and to opt for "critical" support to the Nehru Government which was being aided, at the same time, by the Soviet leadership in a big way as a lever in the cold war. Sharp differences within the party came up at the Fourth Congress at Palghat (1956) mainly relating to the class character of the Indian Government, assessment of the Five Year Plans and Nehru's foreign policy. But the Congress instead of resolving the differences created further confusion. The next Congress at Amritsar (1958), meeting on the morrow of the big electoral victory of the party in Kerala (1957), registered a further shift to the right. The party decided to convert itself from a cadre party into a mass party and, ostensibly guided by the 1957 Moscow Declaration, proclaimed its goal as socialism through peaceful means. The Amritsar Congress was, in fact, the high water mark of right opportunism in the party.

The period after 1958 saw the sharpening of differences between the right and the left factions of the party which was brought almost to the verge of a split in 1961. The period also witnessed the escalation of the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute and the Sino-Indian border conflict. In between, in July, 1959, the Communist Ministry in Kerala was dismissed by the Nehru Government which, immediately afterwards, obtained a massive Soviet credit totalling Rs 3,000 million. Without taking any lesson from such events the CPI leadership lined up more and more behind Nehru to the extent of even identifying itself with the Government's stand on the border conflict with China. Very interesting was the following statement by Namboodiripad in November, 1959. "In case of aggression we are one with the government. It is for the government of the day to decide whether aggression has been committed or not" (quoted P. 90). The

Seventh Congress met at Vijayawada (1961). It was marked by the intervention of Suslov who threw his weight behind the rightists fearing a left offensive. He made the point that India was a free country because it had taken the road of "sovereign independent development" and had become independent "for ever." He offered a veiled directive to the party to work "hand in hand with the country's other patriotic forces for eliminating economic backwardness, building up a stable and independent economy." Mohan Ram makes the important point that while Suslov almost openly intervened on behalf of the rightists there was no evidence, up to that point, of any Chinese attempt to influence the CPI's political line.

The party leadership came out in open criticism of China, and Ajoy Ghosh, taking the Indian Government's version of the border conflict for granted, demanded that China should put an end to incursions and ensure that they did not occur again. Be it noted that it was the CPI leadership that had first attacked China and the CPC only counter-attacked later. The Dangeite faction within the party leadership in its tirade against the 'leftists' was unjustifiably accusing them of being pro-China while pushing the party to the right by extending unqualified support to the Nehru Government on the border war (October, 1962). As a matter of fact there was no substantial difference between right and 'left' on the border question. Both the groups agreed that "aggression" had taken place and that "defence" was necessary against "aggression". An example of the party leadership's capitulationism was provided by the fact that in the National Council Resolution (October-November, 1962) on border conflict there figured a paragraph on China which, though withheld from the public, was conveyed to Nehru. The paragraph spoke of "socialist China's gross violation" of the "common understanding in the communist world in relation to peaceful co-existence and attitude to newly liberated countries

and the questions of peace and war", as well as its "narrow nationalistic considerations at the cost of the interests of world peace and anti-imperialism" (quoted P. 138). The resolution was closely followed by a letter to fraternal parties from the CPI leadership signed by, among others, Namboodiripad defending the Indian Government's stand on the border question, including its acceptance of arms supplies from the West and referring to the "serious mistakes" of the Chinese leadership. The period saw the abject surrender of the party leadership to bourgeois nationalism and its wholesale collaboration with the ruling class. Thus Dange, as General Secretary of the AITUC, without even consulting the trade unions, offered industrial truce to the Government. During the period the INTUC led more strikes than the AITUC. Again, the Congress party opposed the U.P. Government's raising of the land levy but Z. A. Ahmed, on behalf of the CPI, supported it. Further, during the elections to Parliament from several constituencies the Central Secretariat of the party directed that the party should support the Congress. The masses of course would have none of these manoeuvres and they were increasingly restive against the growing burdens imposed by the ruling class. To neutralize this mood and to recover some of the lost prestige the CPI organized the "Great Petition" movement. The demands in the petition aimed at strengthening Nehru's hands and Dange would not even include the release of Communist detenus among the demands.

No Real Debate

This, however, could not continue for a long time without liquidating the Communist Party itself excepting in name. The party ranks were increasingly revolting against the leadership's open betrayal. A section of the leadership, usually dubbed 'left', saw this clearly and, in order to contain the increasing militancy of the ranks, tried to shift the party line somewhat to the left under revolutionary phraseology. In the

event, when the split came in 1964, it was more on personal-factional than on political-ideological grounds. For one thing, no real debate on any fundamental issue was carried on in clear terms among the ranks, not to speak of the non-party masses. Whatever controversy there was, was confined to the two factions of the leadership. The line of demarcation between the two programmes, published on the eve of the respective Seventh Congress, was not always sharp. Particularly, both the drafts professed belief in peaceful transition to socialism. On the international ideological issues, which as such played a secondary role in the controversy, the CPI had committed itself unconditionally to Moscow while the CPI(M) left them entirely open.

The ideological issues were left unsettled by the CPI(M) leadership for some more time in spite of the ever sharpening battle between the revolutionaries and the revisionists in the international working class movement and in spite of the increasing pressure from the party ranks to clinch the issues. The CPI(M) leadership's immediate preoccupation was the Fourth General Election in which it could demonstrate its strength and show, on the basis of electoral successes, that it was the real Communist Party of India. The election results showing the rout of the ruling Congress party over a considerable area and the increase in the electoral strength of the CPI(M) made its leadership believe in the imminence of a political crisis leading, ultimately, to a non-Congress democratic coalition at the Centre—needless to say, on the basis of parliamentary elections. The logic of this 'analysis' led the CPI(M) to support three of the six non-Congress (outside of Kerala and West Bengal) reactionary governments, subsuming all struggles under the epic Centre-State struggle. A consequence was a series of shadow confrontations between the Kerala and West Bengal governments on the hand and the Central Government on the other on purely secondary issues to

divert the attention of the masses from the failures of the State governments. The CPI(M) leadership pinned its hopes almost exclusively on the parliamentary 'struggle' as, for instance, the following quotation shows. "It is this struggle of the democratic parties and groups in different legislatures and among the people, in Parliament and in States with non-Congress democratic governments that alone can pave the way for consolidating and widening the unity achieved by the democratic forces and open the prospects of realizing the slogan of a non-Congress democratic government at the Centre". (*New Situation and the Party's tasks*, 1967, quoted P. 223). Thus, for all practical purposes, the CPI(M) leadership came round to the same policy of the parliamentary road to 'socialism' as was being advocated by the CPI leadership. It is not without reason that Basavapurniah had written the following to G. L. Nanda from prison in 1966, "It is precisely on the basis of this new assessment (by the Declaration of 1957 and the Statement of 1960 of the world communist movement) that we have introduced this new concept of *peaceful transition to socialism* in our party programme. The formulation of this concept as well as the general warning against the dangers of violence, usually unleashed by the ruling classes, is *exactly similar to the one put forth in the programme of the Dangeites.*" (Ibid, our italics)

Naxalbari

This fast drift towards parliamentary cretinism and revisionism in the CPI(M) leadership was being increasingly questioned by the most conscious militants within the party. Very soon this revolt found concrete expression in the "spring thunder" that burst over Naxalbari early in 1967, shortly after the General Election. There the peasantry organized in the peasant association under the leadership of the communists still then affiliated to the CPI(M), after having struggled against the landlords for years following more or less

peaceful methods, became convinced that it could not successfully fight the landlords without arms, that as the bourgeois-landlord State power continued to exist a mere change in the composition of the legislature in favour of even the Communist Party would not basically alter the situation and that to abolish feudalism the existing State apparatus must be *smashed*. This was the meaning of the Naxalbari uprising and this also signified the triumphal return of Mao's thought to the Indian revolutionary movement.

The United Front Government, dominated by the two communist parties (the major partner being the CPI(M) who wanted to thrive in their ministerial offices and were eager to prove that they really believed in peaceful transition, used all means, including the police-military apparatus of the bourgeois-landlord State, to extinguish this spark. The CPI leadership being ideologically a little more 'honest' than its CPI(M) counterpart had no difficulty in opposing the revolt but the CPI(M) leadership, in order to justify its act without thereby being identified with those whom it had been denouncing as "revisionists", had to cover up its retreat by all sorts of manoeuvres. It posed itself as the only correct revolutionary party fighting both right "revisionism" and left "adventurism". Because the Chinese Communist Party had hailed Naxalbari and the revolt in the ranks of the CPI(M) against its opportunist leadership the latter could justify its stand only by attacking the CPC and Mao Tse-tung's thought on a series of fundamental questions though taking pains, at the same time, not to identify itself completely with the political-ideological line of the leadership of the Soviet party which had been much too marked for its revisionism and collaboration with U.S. imperialism. All this was embodied in the ideological document of the CPI(M) around which, a storm of controversy arose within the party, followed by open revolt from the most conscious militants in different States the most important, numerically, being in West

Bengal, Andhra and Kerala. The most spectacular was the revolt in Andhra where the official draft was rejected by an overwhelming majority of the State leadership. The Andhra leadership asserted, among other things, that "the rich experience of the Chinese revolution and the recent experience of the liberation struggles in backward countries has shown that people's war, prolonged agrarian armed revolution, is the only correct path for social emancipation...the path of people's war, taking our own particular objective conditions of the country into consideration, is the only path of revolution".

Meanwhile the All-India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries had been set up in Calcutta in November 1967 to coordinate the revolutionaries in the country. In its meeting of May, 1968 the AICCCR said that Naxalbari was the "turning point of the Indian revolution" and the "burial ground of parliamentarism" in India. By the time

the AICCCR met, the armed struggle of the oppressed tribals had broken out in Srikakulam over an area much wider than Naxalbari. The movement of the Girijan tribals against moneylenders and landlords began in 1959, grew into mass actions in November, 1967 and into armed struggle against feudalism soon after. The Naxalbari spark had thus spread to the far south. At the organizational level the first serious rift occurred in the AICCCR when it rather unilaterally and summarily disaffiliated the Andhra unit in early 1969, though promising that the relationship between them was to be a "non-antagonistic" one. Shortly afterwards the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was announced by the erstwhile leaders of the AICCCR, some think, rather hurriedly and without adequate preparation.

Main Contradiction

It must be pointed out that various Maoist formations continue to

exist outside the ranks of the CPI(ML). There are important differences among them. One difference is concerned with the principal contradiction in India. While the CPI(ML) leadership holds that the principal contradiction is between feudalism and the peasant masses some Maoist groups think that it is between imperialism and the Indian people while still others hold that without an adequate scientific analysis of the situation and before the struggle develops further it is extremely difficult to come to a definite conclusion on the subject though the struggle should continue both against feudalism and imperialism (mainly American and Soviet social imperialism) and their henchmen—because in any event feudalism and imperialism are both undoubtedly the most important enemies of the Indian people. Secondly, though the CPI(ML) as well as the other Marxist formations are wedded to armed revolution the former holds that guerilla struggle is the only form of

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struggle and, on the basis of what it considers to be the past experience, believes that it is neither desirable nor necessary for the communists to work in mass organisations like trade unions, peasant associations, students' unions etc. as that will inevitably, as in the past, lead to revisionism; most of the other groups hold that, considering the uneven development of the revolutionary situation in India both in space and time, the communists, must be good in utilizing all forms of struggle leading to the highest form which is armed struggle and must not leave the mass organisations to the class enemies but, on the contrary, try to lead them wherever possible or otherwise work in them by integrating themselves with the masses in their day to day struggles and constantly, through practice, win them away from enemy ideology and heighten their revolutionary consciousness.

Thus the Indian working class movement, as Mohan Ram rightly stresses towards the end of the book, has now two basic trends—the one Maoist, that is revolutionary, as reflected in the CPI(ML) and the other formations of Communist Revolutionaries, and the other, revisionist, as reflected mainly in the leaderships of the two older 'Communist' Parties.

As has happened in all revolutions the revolutionaries are initially in a minority and their enemies in a majority; but this is purely provisional. The objective situation is excellent and if the revolutionaries can unite—which is possible and necessary in view of the non-antagonistic nature of contradictions among them—and persevere in their struggle they can certainly assemble the immense majority of the Indian people on the side of the revolution and achieve the decisive victory over feudalism, U.S. imperialism and Soviet social imperialism and comprador capitalism.

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JANUARY 31, 1970

The Press

Brush In The Corridor

READER

LAST week the West Bengal Deputy Chief Minister, Mr Jyoti Basu, received a message from a West Bengal MP who wanted to know what had exactly happened in front of the Chief Minister's room at the Assembly building. The message said that the Delhi papers had come out with frightening stories of the Chief Minister having been assaulted by CPI(M) boys and the correct position had to be known, presumably to counter anti-CPI(M) propaganda.

Newspaper readers outside the State had reasons to feel worried. The headlines in almost all the papers screamed that the Chief Minister had been "assaulted" or "rough-handled". The Chief Minister's own statement in the House, together with that of Mr Sushil Dhara, also helped them. When Mr Mukherjee announced that he had been beaten and abused and his dress torn, his "sympathisers" must have felt that they never had it so good.

But then what had actually happened? This correspondent happened to be present in front of the Chief Minister's room when the incident took place. A group of elderly women, girls and young boys were waiting to submit a memorandum. Mr Mukherjee came out and his first words were, "I cannot talk to you now". Saying this he started to walk away, with the deputationists moving with him. In the narrow corridor there might have been some pushing but certainly no assault on Mr Mukherjee's person. In fact it was Mr Sushil Dhara, who is so concerned with women's dignity, who had little hesitation in pushing away the women to clear the passage for the Chief Minister. While his concern for his party leader is understandable, what surprised most was his dubbing the deputationists, "scoundrels". If the CPI(M) is barbarous, some among the Bangla Con-

gress leaders are, to say the least, not unduly bothered with such things as decency. The Gandhian Chief Minister's concern for truth was also certainly manifest in his statement the next day, when he scrupulously avoided telling the House that he had shouted at the police to throw away the deputationists "by their ears".

Thus the Press cannot be entirely blamed for carrying the stories as it did. When the Chief Minister himself indulges in such propaganda, one can hardly expect the bourgeois Press not to play it up. In fact it is the Chief Minister of West Bengal who has contributed more to the anti-United Front propaganda than anybody else in recent months. What else can explain the Chief Minister's telling a *New York Times* correspondent last week things about the law and order situation which hardly brought any credit to this State? Is one to believe that he is merely trying to be honest, as he claims, even after October 2, 1967? And what sort of a Chief Minister is this who says things to the Press which are collected from dubious party sources and rarely have any basis at all? Perhaps all this is part of the "novelty" of the United Front.

The behaviour of the Chief Minister also often makes it difficult for newsmen to work. For instance, last month he said after a tour of Nadia that some live bombs had been found lying by the side of the road only minutes before he passed by. The story was carried in all papers. The next day the local police report reached Writers Building. It said that the bombs had been found in the morning. The Chief Minister had passed the area in the evening, quite a few hours after the discovery. The detailed message further said that the bombs had been left there presumably by some people who had committed a dacoity in the area the previous day. This news was also carried and the readers must have been confused. Mr Mukherjee might say that he had not known the official version when he made the statement; but that did not prevent

him from making a political issue out of it.

The United Front Government when it came into power last year had decided that the Information Department would be its official publicity agency. But with inter-party acrimony reaching new heights every day, Ministers started coming out with their own stories to the Press. And with the Chief Minister himself guilty of this, one feels certain that carrying conflicting versions would have to be the major task of reporters as long as this Government exists.

That brings one to the perplexing question, "how many days more?" Those who feel, and rightly too, that the future of the Front will depend to a large extent on whether Mrs Gandhi wishes to have a mini-front government right now in West Bengal, might find the *Patriot* (semi-official today) editorial interesting. With unusual restraint the paper has not singled out the CPI(M) as the root of all trouble, as had been the practice in the past. Instead it tells the constituent parties to keep in mind that the strains generated in the course of the search for new modes of smooth and harmonious functioning, are not of such magnitude that they should overwhelm the Front. It says that the Front enjoys public support and can continue to draw on this source of strength. At the same time a new basis of understanding is needed; they will first have to agree that the United Front is a political necessity and work accordingly. It seems extremely unlikely that *Patriot* would have advocated the continuance of the United Front as it is today, structurally speaking, if it had known for certain that Mrs Gandhi and her Government have made up their minds to give the green signal for a mini-front in West Bengal also.

The Other Politics

The Naxalites' claim of increased activity in Bihar, as made in their party journals, may not be entirely baseless. If that had been so then the *Indian Nation*, the leading daily in Bihar, would not have chosen to

come out with an editorial on them. The paper wonders what the army and the police are doing if they cannot crush 900 "saboteurs" and "put an end to the menace". It is interesting to note that it takes the Union Government's admission that the economic situation in rural areas has created an explosive situation, as encouragement for the Naxalites. This

being (the position, the paper asks the people to unite to meet this challenge, stating that they have to depend on themselves. While not questioning the validity of this advice, one can assume with a fair amount of accuracy the extent to which the movement in Bihar has spread. A note of frustration is evident in the *Indian Nation* editorial.

Unpopular Thoughts

MOHIM ROODRO

WHEN I was in Germany, nobody spoke to me in Bengali. Well, I was not surprised. It was I who was in their country, it was for me to try and communicate to them in their language. The same happened when I was in Italy, France, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Poland, all those places. In Scandinavia too! And, just imagine, even in Britain, I had to speak in English. After all, haven't they been in contact with Bengal during their double century rule of India?

No, it is a fact; although I am a Bengali, I had to find means of communication that were understandable to the peoples of those different countries. Either through the use of some travellers' language guide-book or through friends or kind acquaintances who understood English which I could use.

But, truly, there is nothing to be surprised in all this. This is the most natural thing to happen; for, he who visits the other in his own land has to learn the host country's language. And, especially so, if one has gone there to make his living.

But all happens topsy turvy in India. You see, when I was in Bombay—let me start my singsong again—nobody spoke to me in Bengali. Why should they? It was I who was in their land. The same was true in Jaipur, Delhi and Agra, naturally and rightly. I had to keep my Bengali under the hatch and fumble mumble and tumble in my bad Hindi. I can-

not speak Hindi properly, and I am not proud of that. I think the more languages one knows the better it is. Knows, I said. Not just higgledy piggedly noise-making. Well, one day, maybe I'll learn Hindi and I'm positive that'll be much useful. But, you see I live in Bengal, and I really don't have to speak Hindi in my own country: What did I say, Don't have to speak Hindi here? What nonsense! Now, that brings me to the point that I have been trying to arrive at along the twisted roundabout way. The point is this. This is the only country that I know of,—by country I mean Bengal, I don't consider India as one country—where anybody can come, work as a peanut seller, a pushcart man, a coolie, or work in offices from the rank of a lower division clerk to the post of top executive, or make millions in business, and not speak Bengali. No! After all my far and distant travelling, when not once did I think it inappropriate that a people of a land spoke in the language of their own, and the outsider had to learn it if he wanted to make a go there, I found that in Bengal no outsider speaks to you in Bengali. It only reflects one thing, that the Bengalis are a spineless people lacking in self-respect. When, at long last, I reached Howrah, the coolie spoke to me in Hindi, the taxi-driver did the same.

There are hundreds of thousands of non-Bengalis in Bengal, and excepting an exceptionally thin mino-

rity, they do not bother to learn Bengali. You try to talk to them in Bengali, and confusion results. The educated (?) expect you to speak to them in English (ah ! that's high class for you !) and the next, do what you can, even broken absurd Hindi is accepted but not Bengali.

And yet, it seems it does not come to any notice of the Bengalis themselves. That it is a large-scale insult does not seem apparent to them. I know, many will immediately start smelling provincialism in me. But it is not true. I am not in the least a provincialist. I have no prejudices against anybody from any other part of India. My sole measuring method is based on personal qualities. If a man is good, he is good and worthy of respect and attention, no matter where he comes from. But, just as he would expect me to know his language if he has chosen to make his bread and butter in my section of the world—Calcutta is full of South Indians, Punjabis, Marwaris, and Biharis,—of course there are all sorts of people from all other States, but the Bengalis come into contact mainly with those four groups. Exceptions granted, most of them do not speak Bengali. They have chosen Calcutta for their source of living, but it has not appeared to anybody that the first thing one should do is to speak to the people of the land one has chosen to live in in their own language. All the Indian engineers who are working in Germany, what language do you think they speak in ? Malayalam ? Punjabi ? Hindi ? Telugu ? Bengali ? No, no, no ; it's very simple, in German. In what language do you think all those non-Bengalis speak to the Bengali ? No, no, no. Not in Bengali. Strange ! It is no provincialism to point this absurdity out. It's simply a matter of self-respect and dignity.

"One Nation"

This now brings me to the second point. To the nonsense of the idea that India is one nation. How we swallow such fantasies, and how we then wallow in those fantastic ideas,

and how we bring increasing disunity by trying to force unity !

India was never, and is not either today, a nation. It is a geographical subcontinent which happened to be capped by the Himalayas on the top and is cupped in by the seas down below. It is inhabited by a whole lot of peoples, or various kinds, of various jatis, and various habits and customs. But the peoples do not have that unity that makes a nation. If India is a nation, then the whole of South America, North America, Australia, and Europe is one nation. Those peoples have much greater similarities amongst themselves than have two Indians from two far parts of India. Even if we take the continent of Europe only. Let's see. The man from Scandinavia, and the one from Britain, another from France, and another from Moscow,—you take them together, and work out their similarities and dissimilarities. What would you find : Their similarities far outstrip the differences. Yes, their clothes, their foods, their drinking, their dancing, their music, their arts, their social habits, their sexual habits, the basis outlooks on life, are very similar. Take now a person from Kerala, one from Punjab, one from Kashmir, one from Bengal, and one from Nagaland. Yes, now try to find the similarities. Of course there are similarities. Some similarities. Something that is not so clear or definable but something that you may say is sort of a fine thread that links up the different peoples of the subcontinent. That's only natural. The subcontinent has a kind of flavour, maybe. But the differences are far greater than they are between a Londoner and a Muscovite. Well, as yet neither the English nor the Russians have shown much inclination to prove that they are of the same nation. But, here in India, there never was a nation, we are now trying to hammer in one. We lie to ourselves and to others that we have a glorious past, and that is the past of the Indian nation. Never in the past was India one united single culture, whatever happened here or there, or at most over a large part of the area.

But never did one single-national culture cover the area that we now demarcate as India.

India is a sub-continent containing many nations, like Europe does. It is much better to accept that and drop the falsehood and hypocrisy. For underneath the lid festers hatred much greater and stinkier than it would be if this lid was not on. Each State today is conscious of its separateness and underneath the 'one-nation' lie, they hate each other. The Shiv Senas are but one example. Assam another. Orissa and Bengal a third and so on, not to mention the Nagas wanting to be free. Well, not long ago, the Burmese were forced to be Indians. At least, they have managed to escape the monstrous grab of Indian nationalism.

India is not united. We all know that. Everybody knows that. But we shudder to speak it out openly. What fear, I do not know. A sense of sin pervades the subject. And if ever Indians of different sections were to move towards a homogeneity, all such hopes are but ruined by trying to impose unity from above by force. It's like imposing love, an impossibility. You cannot hold a gun at two people and tell them that they must love each other. The only possible path towards true unity, if it ever were to come, is by beginning at the beginning, by accepting the disunity, facing up the separateness and realising the truth. We are different. Let's accept it. We are separate, let's not find it a matter of fear. It's only a matter of fact. If I accept that a South Indian is different from me, it does not at all mean that I hate him. No, on the contrary, by accepting him as he is, I begin at the point where a deep friendship may begin, and that is because by accepting his separate identity, I give him the respect that is due to him,—and I do not impose my ways on him. Then only is there the possibility of coming close to each other, through accepting the differences, and respecting them. But what we do today is, we smile broadly, embrace strongly, pat each other's back heartily and say "Brother", you and

I are the same!" while the moment we turn our backs to each other we rattle our teeth and pass some rude descriptions about each other in most unsavoury words. I don't have to go into the description of the words, for everybody knows them or has heard them.

Hindus and Muslims

This brings me to the third part of my thoughts, to the myth of Hindu-Muslim unity. You see, once you start on a hypocritical basis, it breeds more and more hypocrisy. Hypocrisy has entered our veins in such subtle ways that most of us, so-called educated people, are not even aware of our double-standard living-thinking process. Let's take one instance. I am of Hindu origin, so my information will be one-sided. Nevertheless, let's take the left-thinking Hindu intellectuals, and the Hindu middle class. The day Dr Zakir Husain died, one fire-spouting left-thinking middle-class gentleman passed a remark to his wife, "well well, that's one léré less." *Léré* is hardly a complimenting Bengali term used in describing the Muslims. I frankly admit I do not know much about Dr Zakir Husain, and therefore have no feelings this way or that way. The news of his death was news to me, not of emotional shock. But the issue here is different. In one sentence this fellow disclosed a perverse attitude towards Muslims. House-top shouting about the unity of India, her secularism and all such baloney does not do away with the simple fact that we are neither united, nor secular. During the Indo-Pakistani war, I was about to be lynched by a nationally inspired crowd in Bhowanipore. I was suspected as a Pakistani spy, and why? Because I wear a beard, and well, if one said I looked like a Muslim, I could be. But here's the catch: in this secular one-nation land, to look as a Muslim was enough to be taken for a Pakistani spy. I was lucky. I somehow managed to escape being beaten up as somebody who lives in that area knew me. It never of course occurred to the excited educated-one-nation Hindu mob that a spy does not stand in the middle of the road look-

ing typically like a spy, if wearing my kind of beard was typical of a Pakistani spy.

"Good Man, But..."

Leave the educated class alone. It is rotten. But the problem spreads thinly yet deeply all over the place, in everybody. For instance, mind you, a very typical instance. I asked a vegetable vendor in the market if he recommends the fruitseller next to him. This vegetable vendor is a Hindu, and a very good man. He has been supplying me with vegetables for many years, and I trust him. In reply to my query, he said, "yes, he is a good fellow, and he will not cheat you." He then called out to the fruitman, who is a Muslim and said, "Look, this babu is known to me for many years. Give him always good things." Then, as I was going away from the place, the Hindu vegetable man called me and carefully in a low tone said this, "He is a good man no doubt, but you see he is a Muslim, and as you know, one can never trust a Muslim. That's why I have specially told him that he should give you good things.

This story needs no analysing or paraphrasing. It is self-explanatory. It just shows how deep and how cruel the mutual distrust is, so much so that a good Hindu cannot trust a good Muslim.

One can only pray and hope that such disastrous suspicion will not last for ever. That there is bound to be a way of sanity and reason. That religious differences should not be the criteria for dividing people. And that's why, one day East and West Bengal should get together, and realise that there is far more similarity than dissimilarity between the Muslim Bengali and the Hindu Bengali.

And that this is possible and desirable was clearly established to me during my days in London, where the Bengalis from East Pakistan and Bengalis from India's West Bengal found that they wanted to be close together. The institution where I studied had a few East Pakistani boys, and some Pakistanis from West Pakistan. The West Pakistanis did not much

like the East Pakistani Bengalis, and the same went for the Bengali East Pakistanis in their feelings towards the West Pakistanis. But we got on, we Bengalis. When a friend of mine went to Japan recently, he happened to be staying in a hotel which was housing at that time a number of East Pakistani engineers on some mission. As soon as the East Pakistanis got to know of the presence of my friend, they sent an emissary and fixed a closed-door evening meet. Behind the closed doors, they circled round him,—“tell us about Calcutta,” “tell us about yourselves,” and repeatedly made the point that one day we must unite.

And I say, "Why not?"

Dubious Angst

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

IT seems Manik Bandopadhaya's stories have hard luck with the movie versions. The first one to appear on the screen, *Putul Nacher Itikatha* was a disaster. Now comes another debacle, *Dibaratrir Kavya*. A kind of romantic treatment of the existentialist angst, the original has many weak links which the screen adaptation has not been able to avoid. The central character, Heramba, suffering from an emotional imbalance between affections and afflictions, has a Probodh Sanyal touch of unreality about him. The ambiguity of his alienation has been left unexplored in spite of plenty of dull didactic debates on human relationships. Obviously, Antonioni's thesis on "shared pity" has been working behind the back of the film directors' mind, but the expertise to bring alive the theme of the breakdown of communication on the screen, is clearly beyond their grasp. Another drawback is the lack of proper integration of two episodes of the novel dwelling on two women representing two faces of feminine attraction, Supriya, the domestic kind, and Ananda, imbued with a destructive charm of the femme fatale variety.

After an impressive beginning, with the camera moving about on inanimate objects while an off-voice reels off the agonised movements, the scripting goes haywire and the content becomes larger than the container. The characters do all the smart things, talk their hearts out on some bold topics, but all the same they become just oversized symbols of outmoded ideals and not people of flesh and blood. Ridiculous also are the attempts to infuse some laboured visual metaphors like the blending of Konark's erotic sculpture with the amorous jaunts of Heramba and Ananda, and the rocking boat as the symbol of the troubled mental state of the characters. The performances are all dreary; the worst offender in this respect being Vasanta Chowdhury blabbering his lines with a monotonous, disgusting drawl.

Letter

What Price Opportunism ?

Our CPI(M) Ministers talked a lot about launching and strengthening class struggle from their gaddi, though bound hand and foot by the bourgeois Constitution. Such talk can delude only the naive who believe in miracles. Let alone class struggle, the Ministers have been following the typical Congress way in practically everything, including the problems of hoarding, blackmarketing, rocketing prices and the nightmarish city transport. They appear helpless in the face of deliberate sabotage by business magnates in the form of lockouts, threats to remove factories from West Bengal etc. (The Birlas have virtually made their Air Conditioning Corporation factory defunct for no reasons at all. They are black-mailing their workers by the threat of removing it to Delhi). Take transport. Talk of fare increase and maintaining the status quo flows about alternately. Does the Transport Minister require the Centre's permission to appoint a fare inquiry commission forthwith to find out how

the tramways and State transport, with human loads overflowing the whole day, can suffer losses? Before rationalising the fares, a thorough examination of the state of affairs is called for. Why 40% of the buses are off the road, why so many breakdowns, how much money is grabbed by contractors and by selling the spare parts in the black-market, how much money goes down the drain for these top heavy bureaucratic organisations with do-nothing but highly-paid bureaucratic officers? These precisely are the weak points where considerable economy is possible. At least fares should never be increased before these inquiries justify it. But from the apologia and stammering comments by the CPI(M) Ministers, is it not clear that they are for expediency and are afraid to offend anybody, even a wrecker like the Chief Minister? Does this attitude benefit Marxists and help to expose bourgeois democracy with all its petty bourgeois parties including the partners of the UF? Or is it a clear example of a hide and seek game among the partners, some form of shadow-boxing? Can communists worth the name avoid offending some one or the other when plain speaking is required? Criticism, the heart and soul of the communist movement, cannot but offend somebody sometime. But nobody wants to offend anybody, either the Deputy Chief Minister or the Land and Revenue Minister, or the burgling Chief Minister belonging to the Bangla Congress. The Home Minister, instead of taking to vigorous repudiation of the Chief Minister's slanders and boasts, has all along been on the defensive, which means inevitable political death. Does he not know that in such a situation where his party enjoys the majority, he must follow the wise precept: Offence is the best form of defence? And why was a representative of a minority party offered the post of Chief Minister? Let Mr Basu, if he has a single drop of genuine communist blood in him, take the CM at his own remark and tell him at this very moment: Well go ahead, resign just now, but keep

in mind that in the next mid-term poll, the CPI(M) will not support your party. Can Mr Basu do it? I am afraid he can't because like all Ministers the CPI(M) ones too are head over heels in love with their lady luck i.e. power. This spirit of hesitancy, pragmatism and opportunism pervades the UF State apparatus. May one ask, what have the people gained by the UF Government's taking over the management of the British Tramways Company and what have the British trans-oceanic shareholders lost? The people gained nothing, the company of British finance capital as well as its British shareholders have gained rather than lost. Why? Because management of an outdated dilapidated transport system is not an asset but a liability which the company gladly parted with and the UF authorities took over. As for the company and its sleeping partners in England they are getting their due share of the spoils. But our CPI(M) Ministers deceived the tramway workers into believing that the act of take-over was only a little short of nationalisation.

We are told even by Mr Dhara, one of the villains of the piece, that neither he nor any constituent of the UF wants its breakdown. Well, it may really be so but that is not due to any concern on their part for the good of the UF Government but simply because all of them think that Bengal in general and Calcutta in particular are not Kerala and Trivandrum. But they are sure to be disappointed. It is a pity to hear Mr Konar saying that the UF regime may not fall because Mrs Gandhi requires it to stay at present. Not the people, but Mrs Gandhi is the prop of Mr Konar's UF regime. Mr Konar is living in a fool's paradise and does not know the ABC of the laws of social development by virtue of which every attempt by any of the constituents to weaken the authority of the UF is being seized upon by anti-people quarters represented by the party of the CM and other splinter parties in the Front. That is the inexorable logic of a factional type of struggle from within, the final outcome of

which will never depend on certain personalities and their subjective desires.

The leadership of the CPI(M) babbled about sharpening the class struggle and exposure of the ruling system in India through the Assembly forum. But what happened? They have produced a big cipher. They know full well that by taking part in the bourgeois government after taking the oath to abide by the Constitution, it is impossible to sharpen class struggle and expose the real character of that very Constitution in the name of which they took the oath. This is the inevitable logic of social development. But even then, they could do some service to the cause they are supposed to stand for, if they took the people into their confidence and told them from the Assembly forum itself the real truth about the affairs of bourgeois democracy and explained at the top of their voices for every one to hear that they are unable to implement the UF programme. No doubt that would have cost them their gaddi. But what of it? As communists they should have tendered their resignation in protest and gone back to extra-parliamentary activities before being kicked out. But no, they do not have guts, honesty and fidelity to principles. Can the unity of the UF be forged? Definitely it can be, real unity, unity in action, unity cemented by at least one basic principle. Trying only to share the spoils with the revisionists and other petty bourgeois parties is bound to fail. Unity with Mr Ajoy Mukherjee, the crypto-Congressite, hypocrite, China-baiter and silent conspirator against his own government? Unity at the top level with reformists, revisionists, agents of kulaks, is sham unity. There is no such 'unity' in Marxist vocabulary. Unity of action when some constituents or members in the minority indulge in splitting activities directed against the very backbone of the UF which in this case is the CPI(M) is absurd. Why should its leadership go on tolerating the weakening of the discipline of the UF? Wherein do the roots of the

CPI(M)'s timidity lie? It cannot but be its opportunism of the petty bourgeois variety. Otherwise in the perspective of its considerable influence in West Bengal the CPI(M) should have months ago given an ultimatum to the wrecking minority, demanding that it should immediately mend its ways and work in complete unison to implement the 32-point programme. It is high time to tell them in front of the public that the majority in the UF are united and shall remain so even without this handful of burrowers, if necessary. A minority can never be allowed to break the UF.

Please note that I am elaborating the problem from the hypothetical assumption (anti-Leninist) that it is permissible for communists to go in for State power under a bourgeois constitution in block with some willing bourgeois democratic parties on the basis of a unanimously accepted programme of action or of one principle at least. Let us imagine that the present moment of history demands this change in one of the tenets of Leninism. There has to be at least one adhesive tape for joining them together. I am raising this point because the CPI(M) leadership may argue like this: What can we do? We have won at the polls. We possess a majority. Should we desert? Nobody grudes them victory through the parliamentary method, nobody asks them to desert because the question of desertion can arise not before forming the Ministry but after that when they wriggle out somehow of the promises they gave to their voters. Have they ever even exerted one finger for trying to be true to their words? They have all along been appeasing the class enemy, compromising basic principles with the hope of somehow keeping together the crumbling opportunist UF, and thus their ministership. It is precisely here where their desertion lies. They may not agree with the Naxalites, but does it behove them to employ the means of armed suppression of fighting, land-hungry peasants even if the latter are led along wrong lines? If it is not treachery,

what is? Is there any qualitative difference between General Chaudhury's armed liquidation of the Telengana liberated area and the armed suppression going on in Gopiballabhpur, Debra etc.? Hardly any. Whose interests are being protected by the UF regime, with the CPI(M) as the backbone having recourse to armed suppression? Is not the CPI(M) behaving like the Russian Left Socialist Revolutionaries?

It is clear, two camps have arisen within the UF—one, timidly trying to prevent its dilapidation, the other trying by hook or crook to oust the other. While disbelieving in such opportunist, unprincipled blocs one has to choose the lesser evil for the time being only as a respite for organising mass struggles. In a UF minus the CPI(M), the generals will outnumber the soldiers. But can't the CPI(M) call the bluff? It can but is afraid to do it. That is why it is sitting on the fence, talking about reunion of the UF constituents and at the same time threatening the others with mass upheavals in case it is thrown out of this federation of factional groups with separate centres called parties exclusive of the CPI(M).

A CPI(M) WORKER
Calcutta

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