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THERE is a lot of talk going on about Centre-State relations and Mr. Kamaraj has suggested a conference. In fact the impression is being created that unless the Centre climbs down and Mr. Morarji Desai relents, a confrontation will be imminent and unavoidable. The iniquities of the existing structure cry for redress, but from published reports it often appears that, coming to brass tacks, what is being asked is a larger, reasonable share of the loot, the right to be consulted about the choice of which old fogey is going to be governor and such other matters—these, of course, need not be brushed aside if wider priorities are not lost sight of. What is not at all clear is what the challengers propose to do if even these moderate demands are not met. Assembly gimmicks and the air of mock crisis—often a diversionary tactic—are not enough. Talk of confrontation and then fly to Delhi for a face-to-face hour with the Prime Minister? The times demand basic change, and the minor disputes in Centre-State relations are not likely to lead to an upheaval involving the masses—the habits of economism cannot be turned overnight into political determination. Even the UF volunteers will not be enthused.

There is nothing sacrosanct about our unitary Centre and the Constitution which sanctifies it. Even the rulers know it, they have amended the Constitution so many times to serve their own interests. Some of them should be old enough to remember that during the British Raj, the agitation that met with almost universal response was for provincial autonomy. In the carnage of 1946-47, in the bloody twilight of the transfer of power, after partition, the slogan of provincial autonomy was muted, and the intelligentsia was made to think that a strong Centre could stop further disintegration and plan the future. There were leaders then in whom large numbers of people reposed their confidence. And then, the Congress, which had moved into power almost by fluke, was still a party whose writ ran in the whole country.

After a time, after the initial gains of the first five year plans, it began to dawn on many that the Centre was an instrument of exploitation, that it reflected the interests of Big Business, to whom the public sector had been of immense help. The Centre was bent upon patronising business and industrial interests in particular regions of the country. India was not one country, despite the claims of the English educated. The bloody language

riots leading to the formation of linguistic States was an indication that deep down some basic forces were crying for release and satisfaction, forces which could not be muted by an imposed, artificial unity.

It is obvious now that the Constitution, drawn up by pundits and oldish politicians hoping to rest on their oars and operating through a body not elected on universal adult franchise, is harshly out of joint with the situation today. Not that the situation is one to gloat over: a babel of numerous parties clamouring for their share of power, the alliances so quick that one loses track.

There is case for a strong Centre in a big country when revolutionary forces (we do not mean a national democratic front led by Congress dissidents and cushy left parties) take over and forge the future. But there is no such case now. The cunning of the Congress clique is not enough to sustain centremanship much longer and much wider autonomy for the States may in the long run preserve India that is Bharat. It is evident that the powers of the Centre are overdue for erosion. But who will start the attack? Some leaders think that the time to strike—a deal?—will be after the 1972 elections. But a coalition government will not solve the basic question of regional autonomy. It will add to the cacophony.

News has just come in that across the border martial law has been imposed in Pakistan by those who believe in a strong Centre. A strong Centre in Pakistan has meant and will mean unmitigated Punjabi domination and East Pakistan will not put up with it. With the populous countryside there in turmoil and the big communication gap between the two wings, martial law can only be a bloody, desperate gamble, though it will help the authorities to let loose the fanatical Islamic elements on the democratic forces. Meanwhile, the foreign admirers of the Ayub regime should also pause and think before rushing in arms supplies to Yahya Khan and his Yahoos, the Maudoodi hordes.

Biafra

Biafra's win-the-war soldiers have done almost a miracle as they encircled the town of Owerri, from which they had been driven out last fall, to entrap some 2,000 Federal troops. Owerri may not do the Dienbienphu for the Ibos, but it has definitely ended the bleak prospect of a runaway Nigerian victory which, it had been repeatedly claimed, would come after the final push. The success is tremendously reassuring for the Biafrans who are in their thousands starving to death every month and are pitted against an enemy who enjoys overwhelming superiority in fire power because of the massive supply of aircraft, armour and automatic weapons by Britain and Russia. As against this, aid is going to Biafra in dribblets from China, Tanzania, Gabon and the Ivory Coast. Portugal has allowed the use of her airports at Lisbon, Bissau and Sao Tome and purchase of arms in Lisbon. President de Gaulle's support for Biafran nationalism, which does not cost him either financially or diplomatically, is a major asset to Colonel Ojukwu's Government.

The traumatic experience of the pogrom in 1966 and the genocidal war conducted by Nigeria have convinced the Ibos that they face extinction. Biafra is their "home" and an "end to a journey and an end to flight." In a recent interview to *Newsweek* correspondents, Colonel Ojukwu said that in case of a further deterioration in the food situation, the Consultative Assembly was likely to decide that it was desirable to starve a little more and win freedom rather than surrender. The Nigerians, as should be evident from the indiscriminate bombing of non-military targets and the continued siege to interrupt the flow of medical and food relief, aim at destroying those institutions that go to make the Ibos a distinct community. Genocide, which is defined by the U.N. as the "committing of certain acts with intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group," is being perpetrated by Lagos

and London and Moscow are a party to it.

Britain has advanced some arguments in defence of her West African policy. First, the sale of arms to Nigeria is one of her economic necessities. Secondly, if Britain does not support the Nigerian war effort Lagos may nationalise the British investment of £1,000 million or so—this is unlikely in view of Nigeria's encouragement to foreign private investment. Thirdly, the non-Ibo tribes in Biafra have nothing to do with the Ibos' struggle for survival. But visitors to Biafra who have talked to typically minority tribesmen in the street and in the Government and High Command give the opposite impression. Lastly, Biafra secession will encourage widespread secessionist movements throughout Africa with rival tribes and communities seeking to expel, dominate and massacre one other. According to Colonel Ojukwu, those who think that Biafran independence will tend to Balkanise Africa are betraying a "neo-colonialist mentality." There is no reason to believe that "Balkanisation for Europe and Biafranisation for Africa would produce different results."

If there is going to be a permanent settlement of the war through negotiation, the Biafrans would not agree to anything less than the former Eastern Region. Colonel Ojukwu has suggested that to end the war there should be a month's truce, which should be followed by a cease-fire and unconditional negotiations between Biafra and Nigeria. A neutral body should hold a plebiscite in the disputed areas like Port Harcourt, Calabar and the River State to determine whether these regions should join Nigeria or Biafra. Biafra is willing to cooperate in principle in an agreement to stop hostilities where the armies now stand, while permanent conditions for a cease-fire are negotiated. While Biafra is ready to accept a U.N. peace-keeping force to supervise the cease-fire, General Gowon rejects the proposal since this will amount to recognition of Biafra.

Mr Wilson, visiting Lagos, cannot have an effective role to play

in view of his commitment to the Nigerian cause and his policy of continued arms sale to the Gowon regime despite the recent furore in Britain over the bombing of civilians.

No Imports By STC ?

Our progressive Minister, Mr Dinesh Singh, in his erstwhile capacity as the Minister of Commerce proposed that all imports to the country should be routed through the State Trading Corporation. The proposal, after an onslaught from the giants of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, has been discarded by Mr P. L. Tandon, the STC Chairman. The ministerial proposal and the bureaucratic disposal are not surprising; specially because the proposal was somewhat leftist. Those who continue to believe in the theory of progressive Congressites, poor souls, got another jolt when they saw their progressive Minister jilted by philistines.

The fun is of course elsewhere. Mr Tandon, the State trading expert, did not even try to point out to the FICCI officials that the problems of routing imports through the STC, considered insurmountable by the FICCI, could have been solved if only the STC had put its heart in the matter. Instead Mr Tandon said that the issue of nationalisation of foreign trade was too political for him to discuss. Nobody asked him to discuss the issue, though. As a bureaucrat, his duty was to say that the criticisms voiced by the FICCI were all bunk. By not doing so, he has exposed himself to the suspicion that like some other bureaucrats he too has been planted in the Government as a Trojan horse by Big Business.

What were the criticisms considered so devastating? One was that STC officials took their trips abroad as occasions for personal shopping! A profound attack indeed because it involves the basic nature of the Indian public sector. Naturally Mr Tandon was rendered speechless.

Foreign suppliers, according to more serious criticism, exploited the inexperience of STC officials in the

supply of machinery. Raw materials, according to the FICCI tycoons, were much too sensitive to be handled by STC officials. They require minute quality specifications, beyond the grasp of public sector officials. Moreover, there would be difficulties in the distribution of an item imported in bulk to meet the varying needs of the users. It did not occur to Mr Tandon that the STC could employ more experts because it has more resources than the small stray businessman could ever think of.

Nationalisation of imports has become urgent in view of the tricks played by private entrepreneurs who resort to over-invoicing and under-invoicing. It was said, as a counter, that the STC itself might indulge in the same practice. Even if the STC did that, the gains would have accrued to the State and not to a few business houses.

Another criticism was based on the assumption that the bulk purchase of imports would push up prices. The matter of the fact is that the prices the foreign exporters charge for materials and machines sold to Indian businessmen are 40 to 50 per cent higher than the rates for the same goods sold to other countries. They can indulge in this practice because they form giant monopolies, pitted against whom small businessmen in India have little chance to manoeuvre. The STC, forming a State monopoly, can alone catch the Tartars.

Another charge was that the cost of imports would go up because sales tax within the country would have to be paid and because the STC would have to charge a commission for itself to survive as a business proposition. But, against the economic prices which could have been gained by bulk purchases such increases would be negligible and even these could have been pegged if necessary for the country's larger interests.

To say that in the past the STC imports system was found disastrous and therefore nationalisation of imports is impractical is tantamount to saying that the public sector should be dismantled because of its till now unproductive performance. Inefficiency, corruption and ill planning should not

be confused with the rationality of an idea.

Prickly Pear

We were thinking of keeping files on parliamentary politics as it is practised in India. We have given up the idea. Isn't it a waste of time to record what is happening in Bihar or Madhya Pradesh or elsewhere? The Singhs come and go, the Rajmats consult astrologers and Mr Chavan the Advocate-General, the Mishras are at one moment haughty about court strictures and at the next bow to them to set an example of correctitude as train and air bookings to New Delhi are made and cancelled. In the capital itself it is already warm and the ruins of the seven empires brood in desolation as Cabinet members and the Congress President look awfully busy thinking of what carcass to charm back into life in the satellite States. Newspaper space devoted to these 'dramatic' developments is a strain on public memory. Who the hell can remember all these names? What is the Rajmata or Hecuba to remote readers or, for that matter, the Polonius of the Congress, Mr Nijalingappa? The redeeming feature—because it forced the moment to its crisis, albeit temporarily—of palace intrigues was murder. But under the constitution we have, the intrigue goes on and on, there is no resolution. All the while people are waiting outside for a finger in the pie, making calculations about what combination will, in 1972, win that old whore, Delhi. As for the SVD in the various States, it is perhaps time they dropped the initial letter. Alas, politicians of the old order are not doctors, they are the disease.

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Strange Partners

Frustration makes for strange bedfellows. Limited sovereignty or no, not even the East European countries would agree to come out *publicly* on the side of the Soviet Union over the border clashes with China. Messrs Brezhnev and Kosygin tried hard at last week's meeting of the Warsaw Pact countries, but to little avail.

It is not yet known whether, in disgust, the Russians have now decided to replace the incumbent representatives of the member-countries on the Council of the Pact by solid Soviet citizens. But they have proceeded to do other things. Comrade Pyotr Reshetov, a member of the Presidium of the Soviet Peace Committee now touring India, has proposed that the Soviet Union, India and Burma should form a joint military front so as to teach the Chinese one or two bloody lessons.

In his haste Comrade Reshetov forgot some of the other countries which could also be invited to join this great ideological battle of encircling and annihilating China. The more, the merrier, ought to be the principle. Indonesia must certainly be invited—and the Philippines—and Taiwan. And, after all, will it be fair to keep out Marshal Ky either? The Russians may have their little differences with Ky over the nuances of the Vietnam situation, but what is that amongst friends when the menace of China is threatening each and all? Besides, if only the yuletide spirit of Glassboro is revived, even the good Americans can be roped in.

Pronouncements, such as the one the good Comrade Reshetov has let drop, indicate that the Soviet Union has finally decided to bury several fathoms deep the outlandish concepts of ideological cohesion and international brotherhood amongst the proletariat. The descendants of Lenin will now gang up with anybody as long as that serves their narrow national objectives. They will use India against China, use Pakistan against India; they might even, in the altogether near future, strike a deal

with the United States if only to put all the Asian countries through their paces. The pretence of ideology has

been shed once and for all. The White Russians may now all return home.

View From Delhi

Centre Versus States

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

SOMEBODY has a vested interest in a "strong" Centre. Any demand for autonomy for the States was invariably dismissed by the Moghuls in New Delhi as incipient separatism. A bare month ago, Mrs Indira Gandhi was talking the language of a political tyro, about the whole being greater than a part and the like. Which exactly was in line with Mr Chavan's strong-think on the issue. He had often said that only China wanted a weak Centre in India and a weak Centre would lead to divisive tendencies. But after 20 years of a strong Centre, the country can hold itself together only with the help of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the National Integration Council had to be resurrected to paper the cracks that are showing up.

So one cannot take Mrs Indira Gandhi's latest pronouncement, conceding the need for a dialogue on Centre-State relations too seriously. Whatever she might have said, the official stance is one of rigid opposition to any change in the Centre-State relations. Whenever Mr Nambudiripad or the late Mr Annadurai talked of autonomy for the States it was no more than cheap political sloganeering to cover up the failure of their State Governments and confrontations were limited to peripheral and inconsequential issues. The basic contradiction between the Centre's assumption that India is a monolith and the sub-national aspirations remained.

The coming exercise on Centre-State relations is the result of the initiative of a grass-roots leader, Mr Kamaraj. We owe his sudden realisation to the growing secessionist

trend in Madras State despite the DMK's anxiety to contain it. What is happening in Madras is a sure indication that mass politics will overtake the crude power manipulations of parties of the status quo. More, it is certain that in 1972 the Congress will lose its majority in Parliament and a coalition would inevitably mean a compromise on the "strong Centre" theory. So before the initiative passes on to the Chief Ministers, the Congress should act. Under the pressure of mass movements some of the States might have to force a confrontation with the Centre but the Centre would not like any such confrontation, at least until 1972. Mrs Indira Gandhi seems to have agreed to a round table conference of the Chief Ministers to discuss Centre-State relations under compulsions of political expediency and not out of any change in attitude. A dialogue on Centre-State relations would automatically place a moratorium on the States' demand for greater political and financial autonomy for the time being.

Sino-Soviet Clash

Officially, New Delhi has not taken any stand on the Sino-Soviet border clash though a private assurance seems to have been given to Marshal Grechko on India's unreserved support to the Soviet Union. It was on a quid pro quo basis, with the prospect of the Soviets building another terrific arsenal here to contain China.

But surprisingly, the only statement amounting to an official comment came, not from the External Affairs Minister, but from the Home Minister, in the Lok Sabha. It was over the

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telegram sent by Mr Sushital Roy Roy Choudhury of the All-India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries through the Chinese Embassy, supporting the Chinese contentions.

Mr Chavan's objection was not to the manner of the communication but to its contents. One does not know what he meant when he hoped that all sections of the House would "unreservedly" condemn the expression of such views by "any Indian citizen." The CPI (M) benches looked very pleased. The Government has not spelt out its stand on the Sino-Soviet border dispute and that is a different matter. But does the Home Minister expect the whole country to support the Soviet Union on the issue in some kind of Pavlov-like reflex action?

When a Big Business paper wrote about New Delhi's dilemma on the issue, an official story was put out through another daily pointing out that India's stand was not in doubt and it had been stated by Mr Chavan in the presence of Mr Dinesh Singh in the Lok Sabha. What beats one is that no political party had thought it necessary to raise the Sino-Soviet border clash as an issue in Parliament. Nobody demanded a policy statement of the Government. But the Government expects a moron-like conformism from the entire nation on the issue.

As for political parties, Mr Dange has gone about it with that triumphant "I told you so" look while the Politbureau of the CPI (M) opted for a pacifist line, assailing both and refraining from passing any value judgment. The interests of both these parties seem to be converging on Mr V. K. Krishna Menon these days because an unseemly bargain is on over inducting him into the Rajya Sabha from West Bengal. Mr Krishna Menon has already enrolled as a voter from West Bengal so that he could seek election from there if the United Front decides to oblige him.

Forgiveness is all in power politics. And why remember unpleasant things? For instance that Mr Krishna Menon coined that charlatan phrase at the Kerala mid-term poll in

1965, "the extension of Sino-Pak collusion in action" to describe the CPI (M)-Muslim League alliance. Or the fact that he was a party to the collective Central Cabinet decision to dismiss the Namboodiripad Ministry in 1959 in Kerala, and had no qualms about it.

After a point all party barriers merge and power equations are all that seem to matter. About 10 days ago, when Indira Gandhi feared a challenge to her position in the Congress Parliamentary Party over the Morarji Desai episode (threat of possible defections), one of her emissaries was busy keep-

ing liaison with the CPI and the DMK and the defections from the Congress would have been offset by support from these quarters in the Lok Sabha. Earlier, when she imagined she was fighting Mr Chavan, her emissaries were approaching the CPI (M) for some kind of a joint front. But it would be good for the CPI(M) not to remember that she forced "Operation Hooghly" against the West Bengal United Front, though ultimately Mr Chavan had to take the responsibility!

March 23, 1969

Letter from America

'Honeymoon Is Over'

ROBI CHAKRAVORTI

THE newspapers headlined 'the honeymoon is over' in the wake of Congressional criticisms of Nixon's decision to deploy a "modified" system of ABM. This does not mean that Congress will vote down Nixon's proposal for ABM, but that Nixon's actions or lack of them will from now on face scrutiny.

The immediate issues are the controversial decision to deploy ABM and the stalemate in Vietnam. President Nixon may have won kudos for his televised press conferences, but somehow, he speaks a lot without really saying anything new. He is quick in answering questions, looks appropriately serious without being doleful which Johnson was before television cameras, and he is glib in elaborating his answers which give the appearance of frankness and forthrightness. But somehow, as one mulls over what he said before television lights, one finds that he has not said anything new either on Vietnam or ABM.

Nixon's press conference on Friday (March 14) was a lesson in the art of Presidential politics. The question before the decision was announced was whether ABM would be installed.

It was really the first major decision for the new President, and criticisms against the usefulness of ABM have mounted steadily. Three eminent scientists told a group of Senators that America's security system would be damaged rather than enhanced by deployment of ABM in the sense that instead of offering a guarantee against attacks it would merely lead to another round of the arms race. The Senators were so much impressed by the testimonies that they arranged a meeting between them and Henry Kissinger at the White House.

It is typical of Nixon's style that he approved the installation of ABM, but completely changed the rationale for it. The costs will be higher, which means the defence contractors will not be deprived, and yet the original purpose of ABM, namely the protection of American cities, was completely abandoned. The new rationale for ABM presented by the new Administration led by the new Nixon is that ABM is a "safeguard" system which will protect the "offensive" missile sites against a possible Chinese attack in the seventies and "irrational and accidental attacks of less than massive magnitude." Nixon,

in fact, acknowledged that ABM is useless against a possible attack against cities. In other words, the fallacy of the original rationale for ABM was recognised. But this did not logically lead to the abandonment of the project altogether. Another set of rationale was presented to support the ABM system.

It is interesting to remember in this connection that the former Defence Secretary, Mr McNamara himself had seen the futility and wastefulness of an ABM system and yet before he left his job under the Johnson Administration, he acquiesced in it. In his book, *The Essence of Security*, McNamara cites the fact that the science advisers of Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson and the directors of research and engineering at the Pentagon under his secretaryship and those of his two Republican predecessors had all advised against the deployment of an ABM system. They all saw in it "a senseless spiral upward of nuclear arms." Nixon's argument was that the "modified" ABM system will not affect the impending arms reduction talks with the Russians and therefore, it is unlikely to lead to an arms race. Nor will it provide protection against cities as was originally

argued by proponents of ABM. Arguments, like women in T.S. Eliot's poem, may come and go, talking of Michaelangelo, but the military-industrial complex stands pat where it was.

Senator Symington, no dove by any chance, is considered an authority on defence questions. He looked into the ABM question and was bothered by the shifting of arguments favouring ABM. *The Christian Science Monitor's* correspondent asked Symington why so much pressure for building an ABM was brought on the Administration and the Congress. Did he feel that the military-industrial complex was heavily involved?

"In his answer the Senator said," reports the *Monitor*, "that the various shiftings of position by the proponents of the ABM had made him more apprehensive about the military-industrial complex than had anything that had happened since he came to government."

The shifts, he said, in the proponents' arguments are these:

First, the ABM was to be used against communist China. Then it was to be used for stopping the Soviets. Now it is to be used to protect our own intercontinental ballistic missile system.

"At the same time," he continued, "the argument is also advanced that building the Sentinel system could, as in an international game of poker, present the United States with a strong hand in its negotiations for an arms-limitation agreement with the Russians. This stand is a complete about-face from the earlier administrative position."

If Nixon has yielded to the military-industrial complex on the issue of ABM, he is likewise listening to hawks in the Pentagon on Vietnam. As I have reported earlier, the records show that the recent communist attacks in South Vietnam have been made in response to stepped up programmes for "pacification" by the American army. And, yet, Nixon declared in his last press conference, without once blinking his eyes, "We are not stepping up operations."

Some Senators who quarrelled with Johnson on Vietnam have served

notice that they refuse to be fooled by his successor's pursuance of old policy under new rhetoric. Senator Fulbright, in an interview, said he was "extremely disappointed" in Nixon's handling of the Vietnam war, and that he felt the United States bears "greater responsibility" than the communists in not de-escalating the fighting—a point that respected newspapers such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* had pointed out since the announcement of the bombing halt over North Vietnam last year.

Following the bombing halt, Fulbright said, "It is my impression that we greatly increased our pacification program but did not take any other steps towards de-escalation." Fulbright said he has asked his Foreign Relations Committee staff to prepare a study of the degree to which actions by the U.S. ground forces might have triggered the current communist offensive.

Criticisms of the new Administration have been aired by other Senators, too. Senator Pell of Rhode Island said that the Administration should "seek to cool our military activities and de-escalate out objectives." In the House, a Democrat from New York, Edward Koch, sent a newsletter to his Manhattan constituents wherein he said that it was "unconscionable" that the Administration and its Vietnamese combatants should "use the period before peace is signed to accumulate as much real estate as possible without regard to the 200 American lives being lost each week and the comparable Vietnamese casualties."

Voices of criticism are still in the minority; but if Nixon cannot show results in the Vietnamese peace talks, more and more people will rise in criticisms against him. During Presidential campaigns, Nixon had promised a Vietnam peace; if he cannot deliver it, he cannot simply talk the people into believing that he is right where Johnson was wrong. He may be let off lightly on the ABM issue; an unsolved Vietnam issue will be hard to sell to the people with the aid of the television tube and catch phrases alone.

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Two Years Of UF

RAMJI

THE first week of March saw a purposeful exercise in taking stock of the UF administration in Kerala which completed its second year on March 6. There was an element of competition: the Congress, which started the game, had decided to observe March 6 as 'Betrayal Day', and the ruling parties decided to counter this by celebrating it as a day of rejoicing. Between these two exercises, the truth got completely lost.

A holier-than-thou attitude informed the approach of the rivals. The attempt of the Congress party to work up a demonstration on the basis of slogans like 'insecurity, breakdown of law and order' failed miserably. There weren't any takers when the Congress shed crocodile tears over the allegedly sad plight of the common man under the UF regime.

The ruling parties organised meetings at all centres and had supplements published in many dailies extolling the achievements of the UF during its two years in power.

A significant feature of this aggressive form of defence was that the values adopted were alien to an allegedly progressive government led by a revolutionary party. The values were borrowed from the Congress and strictly conditioned by and projected against the previous discredited, reactionary regimes in the State. Against such a rockbottom scale, it would have been easy for any party worth the name to show some striking people-oriented achievement. The UF certainly has several such achievements which shine well by contrast with the reactionary measures of Congress administrations in the past. But to claim these as revolutionary or radical would be to strain the imagination.

The guideline of UF Government activities has been two-pronged, an authoritative statement says. One,

to work within the limitations of the Constitution to give relief to the common man as far as possible and two, to secure more power for the State and to induce basic changes in the policies of the Central Government.

The UF has marshalled facts: a list of achievements over two years. These include a State Planning Board, newly formed, which has drawn up a Plan for the State with a sense of reality and a spirit of determination to meet the economic challenge.

An important achievement is the progress towards self-sufficiency in food. Use of improved seeds etc. in over three lakhs acres of paddy fields has boosted production, thus reducing the food deficit by more than one-fourth, and has brought down substantially the price of rice on the open market.

This is indeed a significant achievement and the crash programme through which this was achieved was implemented with imagination and drive.

The third achievement is the establishment of an Agro-Industries Corporation for boosting agricultural operations and it is proposed to establish an agricultural university.

The establishment of the Agro-Industries Corporation is likely to undo the good work done by the Agricultural Department. Experience shows that in Kerala such autonomous Corporations are irresponsible units, answerable to none, and concerned only with the self-centred activities of the officials. The Agro-Industries Corporation has made the machinery of help to agriculturists highly cumbersome and ineffective. Further, it has got off to a wrong start as its Chairman, a discredited CPI man, was selected solely on political considerations.

The UF has introduced 82 Bills,

within two years, in the Assembly of which 72 have been passed and 63 have become law. The Agricultural Debt relief Bill and Agricultural Reforms Bill (now under scrutiny by a select committee) and the anti-eviction measures are important achievements, the UF claims. It has to be conceded that these reforms by and large have given considerable relief to agriculturists and agricultural tenants. But the basic slogan of 'land to the tiller' still remains on paper. The tendency has been for the well-to-do landowners to unite and deprive agricultural labourers of basic rights, including the right to work. This is seen vividly in the Kuttanad area in central Travancore, the so-called rice bowl of Kerala. The Government has yet to find an answer to this naked aggression against the right of traditional agricultural labourers to work and a fair wage.

Industry

On the industrial front, three new major industries in the private sector and 251 medium sized industries and 2,640 small-scale units have come up during the two years. The employment potential of these amounts to 41,000. However, thanks to the indifference and corruption of officialdom, the small-scale units which are so vital for diversification of income and for changing the traditional employment patterns have not made any significant advance, Government figures notwithstanding.

The iron ore deposits in Calicut district have been projected effectively before the Centre and this holds out very big economic and employment prospects, it is claimed.

The Panchayat Raj Bill, the Bill for decentralisation of administration which would provide for popular participation at all levels, and anti-corruption measures are said to be an index of the resolute steps the Government is taking to promote public welfare. This is a very tall claim. The biggest blot on the UF administration is the escalation of corruption at the official level, the widening of the gap between the officials and the people and the inordinate power and

irresponsibility of the former. In spite of all their pious wishes the UF has not been able to break down bureaucratic apathy and red tapism. Administrative power is getting more and more concentrated at the top. This perhaps is the most disappointing feature of the UF administration, and stems from the need for the various partners in the Government to compromise in order to meet the narrow interests of one or the other.

On the education front the Government has made secondary education free. It has started a new university at Calicut and opened 1,400 new schools.

The University Bill, it is claimed, will help to curb the inroads the private managements of colleges have made into the education system purely on the basis of commercial interests. Security of tenure has now been assured to the staff in private colleges. In Kerala, where education is the monopoly of private communal-vested interests, this Bill has considerably helped to curb the licence of the management. Against this the bishops have ganged up. But they find it difficult to mount another liberation struggle as the students, the majority of whom belong to the Kerala Students Union under the control of the Youth Congress wing, are in support of the Bill. But their complaint that the Bill is not sufficiently revolutionary is in a large measure true and reflects the attempt of the Government to tread warily, at the expense of revolutionary ideals.

Forty thousands families have been settled on government forest lands on sites where they used to cultivate unauthorisedly for years.

To facilitate a switch-over to the local language at university level, a Language Institute has been started and an Official Language Act passed for adopting Malayalam as the official language of the State.

A house-building programme for the Harijans, who are mostly agricultural labourers, has been given shape, at an estimated cost of Rs. 80 lakhs. This is still on paper and even if fully implemented would hardly touch the fringe of the problem.

Minimum wages have been fixed for workers in various sectors. It is sought to revitalise traditional industries like coir, cashew nuts, beedi through a comprehensive programme which is reported to have been drawn up.

Electricity has come to 73 villages during the two years under review, benefiting 70,000 homes. Kerala is supposed to be affluent in electric power. But the supply, thanks to the corrupt and inefficient Electricity Board, is a perpetual source of frustration and worry to the consumers, householders and factory owners. The linesmen and others at the lowest level and the other staff in the hierarchy specialise in exploiting the public and this has certainly affected the industrial progress of the State. The UF Government, although it has done something to clean up the Electricity Board, has failed to infuse a spirit of service among the electrical staff and the claim under this head is heavily offset by the acts of omission of the Government.

Under public health schemes new homoeopathic and ayurvedic dispensaries have been opened and measures adopted to improve the food given to patients. The achievements under medical and public health schemes have been woefully poor. There has been no change in the disgusting spirit, scope and quality of service under medical and public health activities.

The scrapping of prohibition in some parts of the State has given relief to unemployed toddy tappers, according to the UF: it has also added about Rs. 13 crores annually to State revenues.

Government Servants

Under the UF regime, government servants have benefited most, it is proudly asserted. No one contradicts this. In fact, the complaint among the general public is that government servants have been over-pampered at the expense of the people. The party rather than the popular angle seems to have guided the UF in this. But it has to be admitted that the scrapping of the invidious police verification

scheme for appointments has been a very welcome step towards elementary justice.

Alas, though the service personnel have benefited in various ways, government servants have become more degenerate, more self-centred and irresponsible and the UF has not been able to give a new popular look to the administration chiefly because of this.

A master plan costing Rs. 300 crores for improving the fishing industry and a massive expansion programme in the State Transport Department are other achievements. While the fisheries development programme is still on paper, the expansion of transport service has been impressive.

The freedom to agitate, without police and other interference, for legitimate rights is another dispensation of the UF administration. This is to a great extent true. And, maybe it is but natural that this freedom is abused by certain sections.

In spite of the claims made by the UF, it remains a fact that the spirit and style of administration, strictly within the purview of the State Government, have not changed so far as the common man is concerned, the common man meaning the non-party man. It must be admitted that party cadres have secured privileges. For the rest, the vast mass of the people are still in the wilderness and there is no rapport between the public and the government servants. The UF administration has been certainly better than that of the Congress. But this does not amount to much. To claim and to prove that it is better than the Congress is no credit to the UF. The people look forward to a dynamic, corruption-free administration with popular participation at all levels. But, in actual effect, the stranglehold of the bureaucracy has not lessened. If anything it has increased, along with an increase in the number and variety of departments and government staff who swallow up a major portion of public revenue that ought to be diverted for public welfare.

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Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

SITTING down to write after a month it seems so difficult to decide where to begin. Certain things have changed. But others seem the same as ever. If anything, they are more so.

The party seems to be already over for the UF. They have not even been allowed the luxury of going leisurely through the morning-after. To anyone who thought that with the installation of the UF Government in Writers Building Calcutta will now settle down to a doze, events in Calcutta University and College Street must have been a rude shock.

As it is the two-day battle has not covered either side with glory. To put it bluntly the UF seems to have been caught unawares and stampeded into making a prestige issue out of the whole affair. If this had not been done, the succession of events leading to the unfortunate death of Krishna Roy and its sequel the next day might have been avoided. Whether one likes it or not the image of the UF was tarnished in the process.

Gherao of the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University is not the first of its kind nor is it likely to be the last, present trends continuing. Nor does it appear that the major partner in the UF has anything against gheraos as such, judging by statements of Mr Promode Das Gupta threatening gherao of the Governor, and Mr Das Gupta should know, if anyone does, what his party stands for. It cannot be argued that one gherao is perfectly all right while another is all wrong.

The root cause of the trouble, the long delayed election of the University Students Union, seems to have received little attention. The rescue of the Vice-Chancellor which sparked off the murderous attacks may have raised more questions than it solved. From reports it seems that some of those who helped in bringing out the V. C. and other teachers were UF volunteers who were not students. Which leaves a lurking suspicion that

the majority of students after all may not have been interested in getting the venerated teachers out for one and for another the operation was only propping up those who had been keeping the old Students' Union going, may be because they were afraid that new elections would bring in the Naxalites.

Instead of such a situation one would have much preferred that the teachers should have asked for and been given police protection to get out. There is nothing sacrosanct about the campus as such. What is objectionable is that the police should do what they like. As it is, some of them are reported to have gone and collected some crackers or bombs from Darbhanga Building. Putting off the evil day is not going to solve the problem. It is not at all unlikely that in the near future there may be some such trouble in some other college or university where it may not be possible to muster enough students or volunteers to rescue the gheraoed teachers or V. C. What then would the UF do? It could either send in the police with a definite mandate and strict instructions not to exceed them or leave the teachers to their fate.

The allegations and counter-allegations made by either side would have been amusing were it not for the context in which they occur. Death, broken heads and limbs and ransacking of hostels and witch-hunts on the University campus and along College Street are not laughable matters. The Naxalites or Communist Revolutionaries as they like to be called can hardly expect anyone to believe that just for fun the UF volunteers threw bombs at each other and thus hit one of themselves. Mr Sundarayya's statement that his party had reports that the Naxalites themselves took part in the vandalism would for many invite suspended judgment till results of the promised investigation become known. It is somewhat strange that the old standby, the 'agent provocateur' has not at all been mentioned in these mutual polemics. I for one cannot dismiss it from my mind that such elements inspired by obvious sources might have infiltrated

both sides leading sections of them along paths not of their leaders' choice. With a little charity on both sides it may still be possible for both to live and work in an uneasy co-existence.

Harsh words have been said about the Naxalites. It is true that at least in Calcutta many of them have entrenched themselves in students' unions and if past history is any guide any appearance of being a hunted group is only going to add to their strength. Much of what they say strikes a chord in the hearts of more people than care to admit it openly. But if they want to make headway, their wily-nily association with Congress organizations and mouthing the same stock phrases as used by the Congress are certainly not going to win them any friends nor will blurring the distinctions between the Congress and the UF.

Much of the abuse hurled at the Naxalites has a familiar ring about it. Looking back we can remember the same words being used about the two communist parties separately or when they were one. Perhaps they have grown wiser out of experience and learnt what is right and what is wrong. But may be much of the harshness is due to the fact that still there are many unrepentant comrades who do not find much sense in the parliamentary game and who know when they may give it up for good.

* * *

Praise given to him by a CPI journal, according to reports, made Mr Sundarayya say that he should be on guard. And this for a party with which his own is working jointly. What then should be the reaction of the CPI(M) to a massive build-up in favour of the UF of which it is a major partner? The latest to join the bandwagon are the industrialists of West Bengal. Delegates from this State, it appears, protested practically in a body against the remarks of the President of their all-India body in which a reference had been made to conditions in West Bengal. They would have nothing which might suggest that they felt their interests may not be quite safe in the State.

Such touching faith is all to the good but it raises some questions. Have they received any assurance beyond those publicised? Or is it their own assessment of the situation that the Government in power cannot do anything to curb their greed and so why not use it for any side gains as may be possible? We may be even offered the spectacle of businessmen and industrialists of Calcutta joining the holy struggle to wrest more powers from the Centre. Nothing could make them happier than getting a few tax concessions and few more licences and orders and in return they may throw a few crumbs to the workers. In time, perhaps, we may even have communist businessmen and industrialists which would be India's contribution to Marxism.

* *

After all the two boys Pinaki and Duke did make it to Port Blair. Not that after the first few days there was any doubt that they would do it. They deserve all the garlanding and feting that they have got. It was not their fault that for most of their voyage they had some escort not far off. Concern for their safety of course was natural but they were out to prove something and knew the risks. To hedge them round with too many safeguards could not have given them any pleasure. But that is the way it is in India. Reporters were not found wanting to seek and publish accounts of the anguish of Pinaki's mother at the absence of any news, duly supported by an appropriate photograph. Hardly what the boys had bargained for.

As it is they took some calculated risks and came through. But in the mad rush to welcome them back home the by now familiar story was repeated and a teenager lost his life. It is time the masses learnt to place a little more importance on their own safety than on wishing welcome or farewell to some celebrity.

No one of course lost his life at the airport but this appears to have been purely by chance. Otherwise from all accounts anything might have happened, the way the youngsters ran wild all over the tarmac. To say

that, however, is not to ditto the tongue-in-cheek talk about law and order having broken down at the airport. The reported concern of international airlines at the happenings of the day also seems entirely misplaced, if not motivated. Such scenes are not unknown at other international airports. The answer, as the celebrated flier Charles Lindbergh found out long ago, is taking some simple precautions. To avoid accidentally killing some one of his fans, Lindbergh stopped making announced landings.

If some such thing had been done the wild scenes at the airport could have been avoided. Visits of the new police chief to fortify security arrangements are not necessary. Short of a fortress, nothing could keep the youngsters out provided the attraction was strong enough. Instead of wasting public money on putting up more fences, the police bosses should be told to explain why with all their vast expertise they could not foresee the trouble and take steps to avoid it without use of the stick, big or short.

The Small Family Norm & Literacy

ASOK MITRA

WITH a stagnant and intermittently diminishing population for many decades, India in 1921 was unspeakably poor compared to India in 1961. For quite forty years before 1921, India's population did not grow at all. If anything, it was decimated by pestilence, and even more by recurring famines. But between 1921 and 1961 the annual rate of growth of India's population accelerated to 2.3 per cent.

A small population alone is no guarantee of prosperity. On the other hand, history has proved that a rapidly increasing population at certain crucial stages—either by migration or natural increase—has been a precondition of prosperity. We do not have to travel beyond India for proof: Ample proof is available in Assam, Rajasthan, Haryana, Malnad and Dandakaranya.

A steady rate of economic and cultural growth is more vital for a nation's prosperity than a small or diminishing rate of population growth. The ideal is reached when the two trend lines begin to diverge away from each other, particularly when the economic growth line continues to show a comfortably steady upward trend while the population growth line shows first a steeply descending,

followed by a very slow, upward crawling, almost level, trend.

Wholly unnecessary and harmfully rigid postures have been taken. Champions of economic growth have ignored the harmful effect of runaway population growth. Champions of population control have underestimated the utter necessity of economic growth. Few have stressed that economic growth and population control are the two sides of the same coin; and that both are utterly dependent on rapidly changing industrial, economic and cultural technology in the life of a nation. Fewer still have held that growing divergence between the two lines cannot be maintained except by an active and continuing technological revolution in either direction: economic and industrial on the one side and social and cultural on the other.

It looks as if we are in for a new obscurantism. In this we have a curious historic parallel: Malthus raised the spectre of over-population on the threshold of an unprecedented industrial and technological revolution in England and Europe. This industrial and technological revolution and the social and cultural revolution that they brought about in their wake soon stamped out the Malthusian spectre. A new industrial and tech-

nological revolution is sweeping over the developing countries, in places at a much faster rate than its predecessor at the end of the eighteenth century, but it would be futile to deny that what merely was a spectre in England and Europe at the end of the eighteenth century is a real monster in these countries in the present era. But it will be as obscurantist to dismiss the monster as a spectre as to claim that until the monster is killed nothing else is possible. It has also to be recognised that the monster will be with us for quite some more time until it is subdued. For this two things are necessary: To devise ways of reducing the monster's strength and simultaneously to raise an army of economic and social development which will eventually kill it. There is no obscurantism up to this point. Obscurantism enters when we proceed to apply double standards, when we try to separate the twin process and claim that it is possible to attain the small family norm of a highly literate, materially and industrially developed society in societies with limited literacy material and industrial development, where subsistence economy still obtains in large areas where a surplus of fresh human stock is the only tangible capital that can be invoked.

The situation becomes even more difficult when within the selfsame developing country two or more strata appear, one almost at the level of a literacy, material and industrial well-being comparable with any obtaining in the developed world, and another much wider and thicker living almost on the level of illiteracy and subsistence and incapable of voluntarily exercising economic choices. The situation becomes still more complex when, bereft of the power of exercising economic choices, these levels while acknowledging the validity and even desirability of accepting the small family norm, are yet deprived of the means and objective motivation of accomplishing it.

Decline in Mortality

In India, one thing has been clearly and unmistakably established by a

variety of investigations. Thanks to assiduous public health measures along with a better distribution and availability of food, mortality has spectacularly declined, particularly at the early ages, convincing every parent that it is no longer necessary to raise a number of children to guarantee the survival of only a few. Even infant mortality, and mortality at very young ages, although still comparatively high, have been reduced by more than half in the last twenty years, so much so that a parent feels reasonably assured that once a child has reached the age of six it can survive to the full span of life. It is therefore unnecessary to have children by more than a margin of, say, 20 per cent of what labour he actually requires for the economic activity of his family. In the light of this plain conviction one feels reasonably certain that the small family norm would come sooner and more universally in the developing countries in the latter half of the twentieth century than it did in the countries of the West which took a much longer time to reduce mortality. In the matter of improvement of public health and distribution of food, the developing countries have caught up to a large extent with the West and have provided the pre-conditions for the small family norm. But, in the matter of creating the conditions themselves for sustaining the small family norm, a fuller transformation still awaits the developing countries. Without this transformation it is possible that the developing countries will still hold out the promise but not the fulfilment of the small family norm. This transformation seems to lie through the adoption of universal literacy; the resolute removal of acute inequalities of income that grievously constrict the savings and consumption of large masses of population, the replacing of subsistence by economic choice, and particularly by affording the child-bearing half of the population, that is, women, the means of education, employment and income.

These naturally bring in their train the entire universe of agriculture and industry, rural and urban internal

migration and redistribution of population since all such demographic phenomena are ultimately motivated by a person's desire and strength to accomplish an economic choice of his own. The small family norm is inextricably interwoven with the freedom to make this choice. The greater the freedom of the choice, the easier seems to be the manipulation of births, whether consciously or unconsciously undertaken.

Nowhere is it more aptly illustrated than in the recurring phenomenon of post-war baby booms. A variety of reasons—biological, social, economic and even metaphysical—have been offered by way of explanation. But the invariable factor attending these baby booms has been scarcity and rigour leading to the curtailment of consumption and employment opportunities in the period immediately following the cessation of war. It has been noticed that baby booms disappear with the emergence of postwar reconstruction booms and economic expansion. This may well seem a drastic over-simplification of the economic theory of population, but in recent years considerable work has gone into the effects of economic changes on the size and structure of the family and on the effects of economic variables on human fertility. Outstanding work on the influence of economic variables has been made in this field by scholars like Gary Becker, Jacob Mincer and Milton Friedman. Becker, for instance, treats a child as a consumer durable and analyses parents' demand for a child in terms of basic economic variables like prices and income the same way as the demand for any consumption good is studied. Friedman concludes that children are both a consumption good, as a source of direct satisfaction, and an investment good, as a source of income and a means of obtaining security in old age. He goes on to say that "from this point of view, children are to be regarded in a dual role: They are consumption good, a way of spending one's income to acquire satisfaction, an alternative to purchasing automobiles or domestic service or

other goods; and they are a capital good produced by economic activity, an alternative to producing machines, or houses or the like." Jacob Mincer has made detailed studies of the effect of business cycles on fertility. Incidentally, the perceptible rise in the size of the family in the American Continent may be due to the fact that saturation has almost been reached in the satisfaction of acquiring houses, automobiles or domestic appliances or other goods, and one of the worthwhile outlets of being of service to the nation is by having more children and raising them properly.

None of these studies are by any means farfetched even when applied to Indian conditions. As a matter of fact, these statements seem to fit Indian conditions even better, where the choice, both in consumption and investment, is far more limited than in Western economies. So much so that both satisfactions seem to merge more readily in India in producing more children because the range of consumption good is so limited in the rural scene and almost the only capital good that a small farmer or an agricultural labourer can hope to acquire is an additional increment of two hands for more labour.

Urban Growth

The recent Green Revolution which on any showing seems to have taken the country by storm will certainly go a long way in lowering human fertility particularly in those

areas which it has overrun. Evidence also is available of diminishing fertility in areas which have seen much industrial and urban growth, particularly over a reasonable spell of time. This process would certainly have accelerated if the absolute population base in India and its density were lower and if the fertility and employment of women outside home had approximated to that of Europe even of the eighteenth century. The diversity of human cultures, historic heritage, physical terrain, physiographic tributes in India, together with its high population density and high man-land ratio, puts constraints both on regional division of labour as well as its physical redistribution beyond a certain point. High population density and the consequent limitation of spatial mobility are apt to give rise to a host of problems in respect of regional division of labour which also creates invisible balance of payments problems internally as between different States in India, even as international division of labour creates them between different countries. It is these invisible problems of balance of payments that manifest themselves in so-called political problems among linguistic States. It can surely be argued that this problem can be settled differently through a carefully calculated cost, price, wage and distribution system which makes regional division of labour more equitable

(To be continued)

The Press

More Worries

COMMENTATOR

THE United Front Government of West Bengal continues to make news—somehow. The furore over its demand for the removal of Governor Dharma Vira is now past history, though he still remains. Whether he will be gracing Raj Bhavan when this piece appears is, however, a question, for reports have appeared that a new berth may be found for him before March 25. The confrontation with the Centre over food and finance appears to have been stayed for the time being, presumably because the Ministers are busy with their legislative duties. But other things have happened in the mean time to put even the farce in Madhya Pradesh into the shade. The deployment of UF volunteers in and around Calcutta university to tackle the Naxalites has provided good editorial fare to some leader-writers. They are not aghast at what happened in the area; it seems, on the contrary, that they are pleased that the Naxalites got their deserts. All that they want of the UF Government is that the police should be employed for such purposes. For those who did not want to commit themselves on the University incidents the UF decision to demand abolition of the State legislative Council provided an alternative. The UF Government has practically no genuine supporters among newspapers, but none of them is able to ignore it. The Front is compelling attention, if not by deeds by words at least.

The Indian Express thinks that by letting loose pro-UF students on Naxalite students in Calcutta the United Front Government is preparing to turn West Bengal into a new type of permissive society. This is nothing but an invitation to mob rule, the paper says, for if the UF Government can incite its followers to terrify its opponents in the streets so can its opponents. If those responsible for the maintenance of law

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and order, which is the principal function of the police, are prevented by the State Government from exercising that function and responsibility, the way is opened for all manner of anti-social and disorderly elements to take the law into their own hands and bludgeon their opponents, real or imaginary. As an Opposition speaker warned the State Government in the Assembly, this permissive code for public misbehaviour will only pave the way to a civil war. Perhaps this is what the Marxist communists really want, since this type of political behaviourism conforms with the pattern laid down by Red revolutionaries working for the ultimate rule of the proletariat.

The Hindu is deeply concerned at the disquieting phenomenon in Calcutta of sections of the public taking the law into their own hands, of sadistic ghraos—which is but unlawful confinement of citizens for long hours without food, water and sanitary facilities—and of rival groups of students fighting their “gang wars”, without the police being allowed to function as the guardians of public order. All this makes hollow the assurances given by the leaders of the UF Government recently which, in effect, meant that the anarchic conditions prevalent during the previous regime of the Front would not be countenanced hereafter. Mr Jyoti Basu, the Deputy Chief Minister, has been quoted as saying that if the ghrao of the Calcutta University Vice-chancellor and the subsequent clashes in which one person died were repeated “they will be punished, not by the police, but by the people”. It is pronouncements like these and the use of UF volunteers outside the Assembly premises, where the police ought to have been deployed, that suggest the police forces are being immobilised from doing their essential duty, namely to protect the law-abiding people in danger from violent mobs and hooligans. Vague statements that the police would not be allowed to be let loose on the people are indeed alarming in their import, if they are to mean that it is not the violation of the existing laws of

the land which is to be the justification for police intervention, but political complexion of the law-breakers.

Upper House

The Times of India appears to be opposed to the abolition of the Upper House, a demand for which has been made by both West Bengal and Punjab. The paper says that in theory the Legislative Councils have a clearly defined and manifestly necessary function. They are meant to be representative of a wider spectrum of interests than is reflected in elections to the Assemblies, including teachers, university graduates, local authorities and so on. Apart from that, the mere fact that Bills discussed and passed by one House are discussed all over again from a broader point of view may itself be an advantage, since the speed at which Bills are churned out now makes it all the more necessary that there should be an interval for review and reflection before they are put on the statute book. Above everything else, an upper chamber has the great merit of being a continuing body, not subject to dissolution, with only a third of its members retiring every two years. It is less likely to be swept off its feet by every passing wind of change and can thus provide a necessary corrective to hasty and ill-considered legislation. That in practice it has not done any of these things is a different matter.

The Statesman says that the powers of Upper Houses in India are already limited almost to vanishing point. Over Money Bills they have virtually no control at all, and very little power, even of delay, if they disagree with the Lower Houses about any Bill. But here also opinion has often been critical. Upper Houses, even as at present restricted, are deemed to derogate from principles of pure democracy. Their self-perpetuating character blurs the results of elections. Many of the nominated members, as in the British House of Lords, seem rather to represent mediocrity than to honour excellence in particular fields, as was the intention of the Constitution. Lastly, but by no means negligibly, Upper Houses cost the taxpayer

money. Not so much, of course, as peripatetic Ministers; but something. Yet, though the Governments in both Punjab and West Bengal laid public stress on the cost as an unwarranted burden on the exchequer, the object seems primarily and clearly political: to rid the State Government concerned of a House still dominated, however restricted its powers and however narrowly in Punjab, by the Congress.

Patriot does not apprehend any great difficulty in implementing the UF's decision to abolish the Upper House in West Bengal. The paper says that the framers of the Constitution took care to make the relevant provisions flexible enough to enable any State which did not want the Upper House to end it, at the same time providing that any State that wanted to introduce the second chamber could do so. There is a considerable section of opinion which considers the Legislative Councils anachronisms which contribute little to the effective functioning of democracy; at best their existence serves to satisfy some interest groups. In the new political context developing in the country, the possibility of the majority party in the Assembly having to face an unfriendly Council, is emerging. In these circumstances, the West Bengal Cabinet's decision to abolish the Legislative Council appears quite sound. It is time to consider seriously whether the second chamber is indeed needed in any of the States. The Assembly, made up of representatives elected on the widest possible franchise, is certainly enough for the purposes for which the legislature is meant.

Nakshatra's Adaptation

BY OUR DRAMA CRITIC

BRISHTI, BRISHTI is an adaptation into Bengali from a play by Richard Nash. Although the story was most suitable for adaptation and Asit De has done a workman-like job, certain dramatic flaws robbed

an otherwise smooth production of much of its effect. Not having read the original it is difficult to determine whether these crept in during translation or were there in the original. Romen (Asit De), the enterprising young poultry-farmer, has the misfortune of losing some of his stock. This must have been a fair tragedy for him, yet it has no relevance to subsequent developments in the play.

The announcement that a dangerous character was lurking in the neighbourhood and that the police were unable to catch him created an expectation which never really materialised. All it did was to excuse the introduction of the police officer, a quite unnecessary intrusion. Besides, when the mysterious character, Barun (Shyamal Ghosh), makes a sudden appearance one readily assumes that this could be the wanted man and the more the play progressed the more breathlessly the audience waited, but Barun turned out to be a "do-gooder" instead. This seemed intentional misdirection of the audience.

One is reminded of Priestley's Inspector in *An Inspector Calls*. The author very considerably drops a hint about "a police court or a scandal" when there is not even a suspicion of one. And true enough a few minutes later an Inspector calls. Events develop and a police court and a scandal are almost imminent. Later the author himself deliberately sows doubts in the minds of the audience but the dominating figure continues to be the Inspector right to the end even after he is no longer on the stage and no longer in the play. The real jolt is kept for the last line of the play.

In *Brishti, Brishti* the audience was being misled again and again. Why does Barun, who has considerable mysterious powers, work so much on Maya (Sharmistha Ghosh) to make her feel "beautiful" if nothing was to come of it? Some salvaging could have been done if the last tableau was with Sushanta (Tinu Bandopadhyay) and Maya and not with the younger brother.

What was intended by introducing Mukherjee, the shivering, shaking policeman, with a pack of howling

dogs outside, and why deprive the daroga of his torch?

No, the author had no consideration for the audience whatsoever!

The play starts in intense heat with the need for rain fully established. The "rainmaker" arrives following a few strains on the flute, almost like Charteris' Saint, and announces his ability to make rain for a sum of Rs 200 before, with Rs. 100 to be paid after the rain comes. Some believe and some don't. The "rainmaker" insists on everyone having *faith* for without faith he cannot make the rain come. Despite opposition from the younger set he is paid Rs. 200 and after a few incidents of minor importance the finale is reached with thunder, lightning and rain. Just before the climax is reached the "rainmaker" returns the money because his "do-gooding" has been questioned.

So far as the production was concerned the direction showed enterprise and hence there was a tendency to introduce more movement and gesture than was actually necessary. Shomu (Tapan Gangopadhyay), the younger brother, was made to behave like a twelve-year-old and looked nothing less than eighteen or nineteen. Barun could not decide whether he was a hypnotist, a magician or a visiting con-man. Of the individual performances the best character delineation was that of the milkmaid whose control of voice and gesture was indeed commendable. Romen and Maya (Sharmistha Ghosh) should have spoken a little louder. Even from the third row it was difficult to catch everything they said.

The set in wood and nylon cord (or was it just cotton) could have been more effective but for those drab curtains. And anyway one was in difficulty with the projections over the door frames—they would have had more meaning if each of the doors represented different cottages and not the "ins" and "outs" of the same room.

The slow-curtain was used to good effect and came in beautifully timed.

One feels, however, that so much time, talent and effort should be used

for producing better plays, and plays with more purpose. If there is a dearth of good plays let new ones be written. The adaptation showed promise of ability. Let us not fritter away talent by following the wrong path.

The programme should have mentioned the name of the play from which this one was translated.

Two Exhibitions

BY AN ART CRITIC

MANINDRA Bhusan Gupta died last year at 78. As a painter, he has been for many years no more than a shadowy name to the modern generation. It is sad because he was an artist of considerable stature in the neo-Indian style, a worthy disciple of Asit Kumar Halder and Nandalal Bose.

It was a happy thought on the part of the Academy of Fine Arts to have sponsored a retrospective exhibition of Manindra Bhusan's work from March 17 to 24. It must be said, though, it deserved a longer run.

The exhibition covered a period of over forty years of Manindra Bhusan's career, from around 1924 and was fully representative. The 82 paintings, temperas and water colours, and combinations of both, were divided into four sections. First, there were pictures based on well-known incidents from mythology and the epics. They brought out strikingly, among other things, Manindra Bhusan's ability to handle figures, his skilful use of colour and his superb control over the line.

The second type of paintings included landscapes, seascapes and mountain scenes. Notable among these was a series on Ceylon, mostly done in the late twenties, shortly after his visits to that island, and some done about 20 years later. The most appealing landscapes depicted typical scenes of his dearly loved East Bengal: the river and the life on its banks, its lush green fields, the open expanse under its blue sky. The two other sections included portraits and figures

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and sketches and drawings of which some were in monochrome. The latter group had some fine pieces of work.

The exhibits included some paintings done in 1966, which were as good as any he had done before. The skill that Manindra Bhusan acquired through years of effort and a spirit of dedication, he retained almost to the day of his death.

A Child Artist

Another notable exhibition at the Academy was that of the paintings of Anamitra. When his first exhibition was held in 1966, the seven-year-old painter took everybody by storm. He was an unusual phenomenon, not one's conception of a child artist at all. His paintings revealed a maturity of vision and technical virtuosity of adult art of a high order. It seemed that Anamitra did with intuition what others do from experience.

The latest exhibition was Anamitra's fourth, and it was a splendid show. It demonstrated that although the little painter may not have broken new grounds, he has, by and large improved. He continues to be preoccupied with large themes: The endless sky above and the vast open spaces below. The mountain and the sea. The trees and the forest and the beauty of the lonely night. His touch, judging from many canvases, has become a little surer. His palette has gained in the range of dark and sombre colours. He has become, it would appear, a little more deliberate in tackling forms, particularly in the painting of some mountains and peaks.

There is no gainsaying the fact that Anamitra is a phenomenon as a child artist. He is now eleven, and many, we are sure, will watch with interest his progress in the critical years of adolescence.

Letters

Sino-Soviet Clash

The confusion caused by the recent armed clashes on the Sino-Soviet border is now becoming clear, though

rather slowly. The clash and the Soviet publicity given to it took place when the Soviet authorities were shouting themselves hoarse over the Berlin issue and ultimately repeating what they did in regard to Cuba in October 1962 and the West Asian crisis of June 1967. Probably some diversionary situation was needed to cover another Soviet volte face. All "progressive" people of various peace-loving countries, who make frequent free trips abroad to attend peace or similar conferences are now expected to protest against the "barbaric" acts committed by Chinese "monsters".

On the very day the border clash took place, the Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Grechko, arrived in New Delhi for discussions with the leaders of the Indian Government. Being one up on Peking a publicising the clash, is the Soviet Union trying to build up favourable public opinion and to make known her resolve to retaliate strongly in future on the one hand and on the other propagating her pet theory that the Chinese are unpredictable, that Peking is not guided by internationally accepted norms of conduct? This being so, is it not her duty, as a "friend", to caution and forewarn India about the dangers inherent in any attempt to ease the prevailing Sino-Indian stalemate and tension? How can India, the Soviets are reported to feel, rely on a country that continues to ignore and violate civilised norms of international conduct? Is there thus any use in India offering to open a dialogue with such a country that attacked the first socialist country of the world? According to *The Statesman* Special Representative, "India, the Marshal said, could fully count on Soviet help in dealing with her enemies". So no dialogue is necessary, India should go ahead, with full Soviet support, to deal "with her enemies". Probably this is the implication of the recent armed clashes on the Sino-Soviet border and the week-long visit of the Soviet Defence Minister to India. This confirms the contention of my letter published in these columns on February 22.

KALIKINKAR CHAUDHURI
New Delhi

To a 'liberal' academician there may be "ways" of looking at a border clash (*Frontier*, March 15). Not so, I think, to a Marxist, particularly when the clash is between two parties where the contradictions are, perhaps, no more non-antagonistic.

If the present Russian line is revisionist—and revisionism is anti-Marxist—then the motive behind the clash must not be very difficult to calculate. In 1960, in Moscow, the 81-Party thesis (which was signed even by the Russian leaders) placed revisionism as the main danger in the development of Communism. If it is so, it provides a shield for the imperialists who are in the last leg of their general crisis. Is it then very unfair or hasty to observe that the Russian revisionists are fighting on the Sino-Soviet border for the U.S. imperialists in Vietnam!

Yet there can be a question. Did the Chinese leaders pursue the matter in all earnestness before the mid-50's? Or did they take Soviet socialism as guaranteed? And then, should not the national question in general, and the border question in particular, be settled clearly even when the parties have non-antagonistic contradictions? The Chinese, too, procrastinated and that is a vice, a non-Marxist trend.

AMRITAVA BANERJEE
Calcutta

"Off Balance"

When he wrote his letter (March 15) Mr R. Ghosh was possibly drowsy. Like him I have also been following *Frontier* from its very birth. But I do not find it "off balance". Your journal's stand was very clear and unambiguous even before the UF victory—see the issue of February 8 in which you state "This journal has no particular illusions about the efficacy of parliamentary democracy in bringing about a re-ordering of Indian society under the existing constraints of the polity. But the enemy still deserves to be mauled where it can be mauled even within the limits of these constraints. If

the Congress is given another drubbing in this State, it would be impossible for it to recover. The liquidation of the Congress, once and for all, will be a major achievement, and one which cannot but give an impetus to the historical process." You further stated 'This journal does not believe in turning the Nelson's eye on the many failings and foibles of any particular group or groups in the United Front. It has been unsparing in its rebuke of the United Front or its constituents whenever it has felt that the occasion for administering such rebukes has arisen. No doubt, such occasions will also arise in the future. But the main enemy still is the Congress, which has to be buried. The corpse has been stinking far too long'. The UF was again rebuked (15.3.69). The CPI (M) was not left untouched either.

The so-called Communist Revolutionaries generally characterise the CPI (M) as neo-revisionists, as it fights election battles and captures the Ministry through the UF, "a conglomeration of so many diverse parties with different antagonistic ideologies forming 'an opportunistic alliance'". In this characterisation Mr Ghosh seeks support from Lenin's "Left-wing communism" to preach the political implications of the 'boycott' slogan. Such pedants deliberately miss other parts of the book. In the same book under the caption 'No compromise?' Lenin states, "The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and by the most thorough, careful, attentive, skilful and obligatory use of any, even the smallest, rift between the enemies, any conflict of interests among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries and also by taking advantage of any, even the smallest, opportunity of winning a mass ally, even though this ally is temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional... And this applies equally to the period before and after the proletariat has won political power".

Between 1903 and 1912, there

were periods of several years in which Lenin went so far as to unite with the Mensheviks in a single Social-Democratic Party but all the same he waged an ideological and political campaign against them. Boycott of Parliament is useful and even essential in a revolutionary situation. A revolutionary situation is a nationwide crisis affecting both the exploiters and the exploited. It is in this context that the bankruptcy and infantile ideology of the 'boycott' slogan of the present-day Indian Communist Revolutionaries should be exposed.

JYOTIRBIKAS KUNDU
Nabadwip

I have been with you since the inception of your paper though sometimes I differ with you. Charan Gupta wrote in the Calcutta Diary of December 21 that Naxalbari has a glorious and exhilarating side. Not only this, he wrote, "who can deny that whatever ferment there is discernible today in the country is on account of the daring and sweep of the little 'adventure' that was launched in the West Bengal Terai last year—and on account of the zestful, idealistic students who took it up from there?" Now after only two months (March 1) he speaks of Naxalbari deviations. Is it an honest switch-over or opportunism?

SUDIPTA MAJUMDAR (Miss)
Ranaghat

Jadavpur

As members of the staff and students of Jadavpur University we would like to draw your attention to certain facts which quite unfortunately you have overlooked in your editorial "Show Cause" (March 8).

First of all, the show cause notice was issued on the students who brought in not merely striking workers from the adjacent Bengal Lamp Factory, but groups of hoodlums from Bejoygarh colony and Haltu areas, the ratio of outsiders to students being 200 and 25. This fact you have deliberately overlooked. It may be mentioned that slogans like "Jaraja

Santan Hem Guha ke purie maro" were raised by the gang of workers, hoodlums and a meagre handful of students. The activities of these students (the Naxalites who lost heavily in the student union elections and are completely isolated from the mainstream of the students of this University), are of treasonable character and are sufficient not only for the authorities to issue show cause notices but for the students' expulsion from the University altogether.

About your comment that the Governing Body of the University "is composed mainly of elements farthest from things educational", we would like to say that there is nothing wrong in having industrial tycoons in the Governing Body. The industrialists and businessmen who happen to be on the Governing Body do not in any way influence the decisions of the University Academic Council which takes decisions on academic matters.

About the "obscenity" of the film shown in the Jadavpur University Film Club, members of the ultra group of students have privately admitted to us that the film in question had an obscene part (which could have been detected during its screening in the University), but it also had a moral part, to be more exact, the whole film (except the minor obscene scene) had nothing immoral about it.

We are at a loss to appreciate your humour when you urge Mr Satyapriya Ray, the present Education Minister, who himself had been an anarchist in the field of education throughout his life, to enquire into the affairs of Jadavpur University, "the darling institution of American foundations." Would you kindly have the honesty to first look into the facts and figures about the various Indian universities and their sources of income from various foundations, be they American, Russian, French or otherwise, and then indulge in your polemics and journalistic propaganda?

Some students, Dept. of Engineering
Some members of the Staff, Dept.
of Science,
Jadavpur University.

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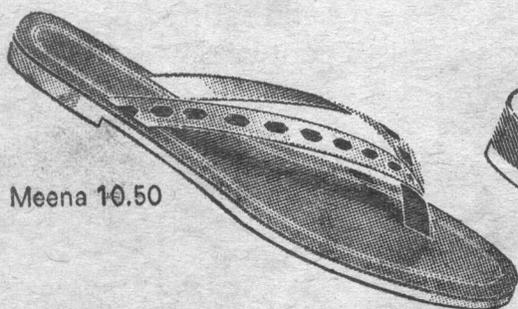
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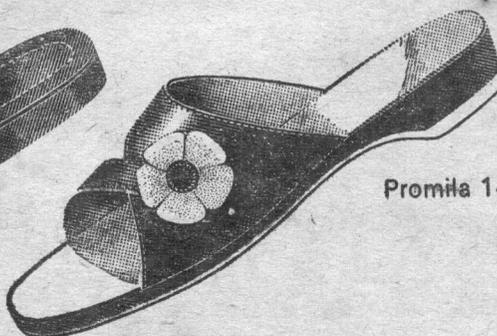
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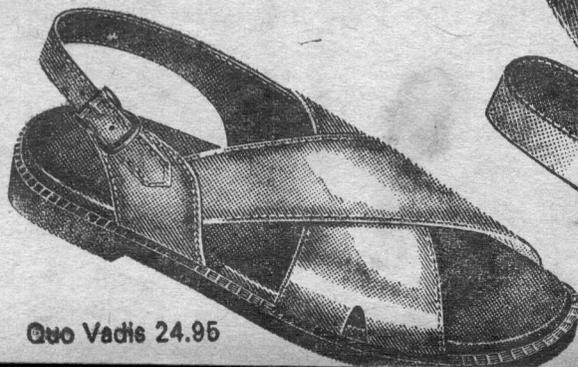
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