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On Other Pages

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----|----|
| COMMENTS | .. | 2 |
| <i>View From Delhi</i> | | |
| KERALA CONUNDRUM | | |
| FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT | .. | 5 |
| MEET DR. HABBASH | | |
| A. K. ESSACK | .. | 6 |
| TAMING THE RIVERS | | |
| TARUN CHATTERJEE | .. | 7 |
| FRANKLY SPEAKING | | |
| SANJOY | .. | 10 |
| TRIPURA: EXIT MAHARAJA | | |
| FROM A CORRESPONDENT | .. | 11 |
| "COPY BOOK" EXAMINATIONS | | |
| BY A CORRESPONDENT | .. | 13 |
| CLIPPINGS | .. | 14 |
| LETTERS | .. | 16 |

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CIVIL WAR IN JORDAN

IT perhaps lay in the logic of history that Arab revolutionaries fighting for the liberation of their Palestine homeland would one day have to turn on their guns against their own rulers—at first unwilling allies and later open enemies of their cause. In fact guerilla leaders like Dr George Habbash and Naif Hawatemeh had always made it clear that the Palestine revolution will be complete not only after the liquidation of the Zionist State but of Arab exploiters as well. The socio-economic emancipation of the Arab people was not however regarded as an immediate programme. It was not in the interest of their armed struggle that the guerillas should at this stage fight for social revolution—for the establishment of people's power in the reactionary Arab States. But once their "allies" tried to stab their struggle in the back in a move not unlike that of Chiang Kai-shek against the Chinese communists, the Palestinian guerillas had no other option but to fight back. That exactly what is happening now in Jordan.

The reason that prompted King Hussein to launch a massive and treacherous attack on the Palestine liberation fighters is not far to seek. And this, to be sure, is not the first time that the Jordanian authorities have attacked the commandos who operate from the east bank of the Jordan. Ever since the Palestine Liberation Organisation decided to build commando bases in Jordan King Hussein, despite all his talk of solidarity with the Palestinian cause, has felt uneasy. He could not overlook the inherent danger of the situation where the underdogs of his kingdom, a large part of whom are Palestinian refugees, were growing into self-confident fighters. The permanent tension that existed between the commandos and the Jordanian army frequently erupted into bloody clashes. Invariably the clashes were preceded by Jordanian attempts to curb the power of the guerillas.

Egypt and Jordan's acceptance of the Rogers plan and the conclusion of the cease-fire agreement with Israel early last month virtually removed the last plank that bridged the yawning gulf between King Hussein and the PLO. The peace plan fathered by Washington and blessed by Moscow aimed at perpetuating the Zionist State while allowing Jordan and Egypt to recover the territories lost in the June 1967 war—a clever move to create divisions among Arab ranks. By

accepting this plan King Hussein hoped not only to recover the West Bank of the Jordan river and Jerusalem but also to get rid of the revolutionary forces growing inside his kingdom. Once the guns were silent on the Jordan river he could concentrate on the menace within. Immediately after the cease-fire many of the front-line units of his army were withdrawn to positions closer to the capital. And just a day after the Palestine National Council, the political superstructure of the guerilla movement, had issued on August 28 a call for the mobilisation of all efforts to sabotage the peace talks the Jordanian army launched a fierce attack on commando positions. Not content with this move King Hussein last week handed over the government to the Army in an effort to crush the Palestinian resistance movement. Israel could not have a better ally nearer home than King Hussein and it was only natural that the Israeli airforce would operate in support of the Jordanian army. Nor

is it surprising that the mastermind of the plot in Washington would indulge in sabre-rattling to scare the guerillas into submission. The U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and military bases from West Germany to Turkey were alerted for possible intervention in Jordan under the pretext of evacuating 400 American nationals. But the two million homeless Palestinians who have been eking out a subhuman existence in hovels in refugee camps, who have suffered thousands of casualties in fighting for the recovery of their homeland, cannot be cowed down by King Hussein or bullied into surrender by the Americans. They have seen in Vietnam and more recently in Cambodia the powerlessness of an imperialist army before a united people. At the time of writing the guerillas, united to a man, have spurned the call to attend a summit in Cairo and pledged to carry on the war against imperialism and its lackeys to the finish.

and self-aggrandisement' of the EMS leadership. Surely a mere increase or decrease in the respective numbers of MLAs tells us very little; it could be a simple by-product of our electoral system and alliances without a corresponding shift in popular preference. An analysis of voting patterns is more to the point. By the yardstick a somewhat different picture emerges. In 1970, as in 1967, the parties now belonging to the CPI(M) front have been able to keep the allegiance of about one-third of the electorate. The Congress(R)-CPI front has seen its share reduced from nearly one-half to about two-fifths of the electorate. (Since in 1967 there was no split in the Congress party one has to reallocate their 1967 votes according to the relative performance of the Congress(R) and the Congress(O) in the current election.) Outside the two fronts, the Kerala Congress finds its share of votes reduced from 7.56% to 6%. Thus there is no reason to assert that the people of Kerala have rejected the Marxists in the election battle and found their salvation in the Congress(R)-CPI coalition; indeed, if the above analysis is correct, some 10% of the electorate have become disenchanted with the latter. By contrast the relative stability in the votes for the CPI(M) front is all the more remarkable since it lost the backing of all mini-frontwallahs, gaining in the process clandestine and in any case largely symbolic, support of the Congress(O).

So much for election arithmetic with which the Marxists are obsessed despite their protestations to the contrary. On the political plane the election results, however, vindicate the strategy of Mrs Gandhi, perhaps the shrewdest woman in South-East Asia. So long as the parliamentary game is on, new-look reformism does pay. By a clever manipulation of parties and alliances, and the timing of rubber prices and such other things, a majority can be manufactured, leaving out 'extremists' both from the Right and from the Left. Her political stooges, the CPI, had learnt this lesson too well, merrily jumping in and out of coalitions whenever it suited them. Now they

What Now, EMS ?

A correspondent writes :

1957, 1967, 1960, 1970. It seems to be a 10-year cycle pursuing EMS Namboodiripad and his party. Illusions of victory followed by measures of limited reform breed confidence about the people's verdict through the ballot and further illusions of an expanded mass base. In no time the others, some of whom may have been at one time comrades-in-arms with EMS's party, gather together and hatch a conspiracy to topple it. Mr Namboodiripad does not keep still; he carries on with what he calls progressive measures but somehow manages to win fewer friends than foes in the process. Comes election time and the rules of psephology assert themselves. Mr Namboodiripad finds himself defeated, even if the party's performance was no worse than at the last elections.

By the rules of the parliamentary game, the Marxists in Kerala have no doubt suffered a major setback. Their arch-enemy, Mr Achuta Me-

non, and his team, openly backed by Mrs Gandhi's Congress, have got an absolute majority of 68 in a house of 133. The Kerala Congress with its 11 MLAs is expected to fall in line with them pretty soon. For a while at least this coalition, or a variation of it, is going to rule over Kerala. The CPI(M) front, on the other hand, can reckon on only 45, though 5 Independent MLA's associated with the Congress(O) had also won the blessings of the CPI(M). (What a patchwork it was!) Compared to the last Assembly, the Congress(R) has made the most impressive gains, while the biggest losses are sustained by the CPI(M).

But what about the People's Choice? It is already being pointed out by the CPI(M) that the people did not flock in their millions to uphold the alliance of Congress(R), CPI, RSP, PSP and the Muslim League, rejecting the CPI(M) and its partners. It is not a vote for orderly progress and against the "lawless adventurism

are all itching for the right moment to continue their victory match into West Bengal.

Obviously, the CPI (M) needs some basic rethinking. If its primary goal is the achievement of power at the State level by wallowing in the parliamentary mud can it afford the stance it has taken in and out of office? Brave talk of wrecking the Constitution from within, of combining administration with agitation, of struggling against the vested interests in the world of education—all these may not pay election dividends in the face of the disintegrated united front. In other words, the CPI (M) must look more and more 'reasonable' and 'respectable' if it wants to aim at prolonged power within the existing socio-political structure. Otherwise, power, if it is ever going to attain it again, will slip away from its fingers. The ruling classes are quite adept at corroding any Left alliance as it has done not only in India but also in many other parts of the world.

If revisionism plain and simple is too much for the CPI (M) to swallow, it must stop counting its losses and gains by the rules of the parliamentary game. It must get back into the habits of its 'opposition' days and cease to clamour for power under the present Constitution. Quite apart from the difficulties of attaining a parliamentary majority, being in power brings but few comforts to the radical rank and file: after having raised the wages of some workers, and recovered some benami land, very little is left to be done. Neutralising the police force for a few months is all very well but does not alter the basic picture. It takes but a very short time from the exit of radical ministers for the police as a whole to reacquire its former repressive character.

Logical imperatives do not always impose themselves in an unequivocal manner on political leaders or their parties. Hence the CPI (M) leaders may not oblige us or anybody else by showing their cards, but in a display of dialectical skill, reject the first alternative, without embracing the second; perhaps they will be after a higher synthesis between the two options. But can they prolong this

sort of waiting game even after the Kerala tragedy is repeated as a Bengali melodrama? It is for their rank and file to press home this question.

See-Through Excuse

Ministers of State are small fry despite the shine they may acquire occasionally from the reflected glory of their full Ministers. Yet the fussy bureaucrats who are ruling West Bengal set up a precedent in blowing up the recent visit of Mr K. C. Pant. Several full Ministers of the Union Government were in town at about the same time, but their presence was scarcely noticed. On the other hand, through non-stop parleys stretching over nearly ten hours the Advisers and their underlings in the Government gave an impression that Mr Pant could be West Bengal's saviour. They narrated to him their tales of woe and how their efforts to end chaos and misery were being frustrated by the Naxalites and Nature working together. How Mr Pant could help in the matter was not clear, however. The Minister of State for Home Affairs could at best be a homing pigeon of a sort; even then the messages carried by him were duplicates of what had already been conveyed to the Centre.

If the State Government had hoped that Mr Pant would plead its case in New Delhi for a preventive detention law, it must be disillusioned now. The implied threat in the State Government's contention that a preventive detention law will enable it to tackle the situation in a "more effective and humane" manner did not impress him. Nor did he bless the alternative that the police should be given a free hand to shoot their way out of the situation. Not that the ruling party at the Centre is averse to either. Almost all States ruled by the Congress (R) have enacted preventive detention laws of their own; in Andhra Pradesh the Government of Mr Brahmananda Reddy, a stalwart of the Congress (R), is shooting down Naxalites at sight. The brutality has compelled a protest even from the CPM which is no friend of the Naxa-

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lites. The Centre is trying to make a virtue of a necessity, for a concatenation of forces prevents enactment of a preventive detention law by Parliament. If there is a reshuffle of these forces as a sequel to the results of the mid-term poll in Kerala, the apparent reluctance of the Centre to confer powers of preventive detention on West Bengal may disappear. The bargain over Kerala is still to be struck; till then the State Government will have to work under conditions of so-called powerlessness.

How the State Government proposes to apply the preventive detention law against the Naxalites remains a riddle. They do not preach from the pulpit, maidan meetings are not for them; their leaders or supposed leaders are all underground. Most of those who are known to the Government as Naxalites of any importance have warrants of arrest pending against them for specific criminal offences. But a large number of these warrants remain unexecuted, because the suspects cannot be traced. A preventive detention law will not make the task of tracking down the fugitives easier. The police have to arrest them before the Government can detain them without a trial. It seems the extraordinary power is being sought by the Government not so much for the Naxalites as for other types of agitators. For the Naxalites the recipe is confrontation—Andhra style; when and how it will be applied is a matter of detail to be settled gradually.

But there are other upcoming forces. Prices are steadily soaring, especially of rice in the countryside. The usual relief with the harvesting of the new crop will be denied this year as, after the floods, not much crop is left to harvest. Clashes over harvesting may be more numerous if the Government tries to implement its policy of undoing to a large extent the occupation of surplus and benami land by landless and poor peasants in the UF regime. Discontent is mounting in the industrial sector. Few closed units have opened; on the other hand, retrenchment and lay-off are frequent because of the anti-labour attitude of the regime. Scarcely any attempt has been made to solve

a single problem of West Bengal during the Presidential regime which completed its sixth months last week. The only growth has been that of the police and the bureaucracy. The craze for creating high-salaried posts has gone to such an absurd length that a proposal has been seriously mooted for appointment of some new deputy inspectors-general of police to deal with the law and order situation. The accumulated grievances of the people are heading for a bust-up. The State Government wants a preventive detention law to restrain them. The Naxalite problem is a see-through excuse.

Three Faces Of U.P. Congress

Whether Mr Charan Singh stays in office or goes out is inconsequential since Mr Charan Singh of the BKD, Mr Kamalapati Tripathi of the Congress-R and Mr Chandrabhanu Gupta of the Congress-O represent the three faces of the same Congress ideology. That these three old Congress guards have fallen out is entirely a personal matter as is the case of Dr Hare Krushna Mahatab of the erstwhile Jana Congress and Mr Biju Patnaik of the Utkal Congress in Orissa. Time was, not long ago, when any rift in the Congress used to cause jubilation among the Left for it seemed to prove the thesis that the bourgeois rule in the Union and States was threatened with antagonistic inner contradictions. But the country today as a whole and U.P. in particular are showing no substantial signs that the progressive forces are putting irresistible pressure on the Congress and making it progressively pro-people. If anything, the Communists and Marxists in U.P. have been further reduced to non-entities on the U.P. parliamentary scene. And there is little prospect of base-strengthening by the Communists by virtue of their land grab movement in the State because the three factions of the U.P. Congress, whether singly or jointly, can deliver the same goods, there being no difference between the Congress and

The Next Issue of Frontier will be dated October 31

Communist methods of land reform.

This being the perspective, it is possible to watch U.P. politics, as one sees absurd drama, with a non-involved sense of amusement. If one can do so, U.P. will offer delectable drama. It is so very civilised. No bloodshed, no storm, no passion. It is exemplary polished behaviour with no rancour or animosity left behind. The coupling of Charan Singh-Kamalapati Tripathi may change into a coupling of Charan Singh-Chandrabhanu Gupta as was promised about five months ago. Chandrabhanu Gupta does not harbour any ill feeling for Charan Singh who jilted him so unceremoniously that time. But this coupling may not produce anything substantial, for meanwhile Charan Singh's lieutenants are going over to Kamalapati Tripathi against the backdrop of the Rajya Sabha where Charan Singh did not save the face of Indira Gandhi by voting en masse for the abolition of the privy purse. If the magnetic Indira can pull some more members out of the diverse Assembly parties, Kamalapati Tripathi or if you will, A. P. Jain can run the Assembly alone. This style of defection which used to be fiercely objected to by the audience is now accepted if only neatly manoeuvred. The high Elizabethan drama of storm and blood at the beginning of the Congress rift has quietly given way to the Restoration comedy of manners. No moral values are involved, only a question of established etiquette.

The drama would have been colourless and anaemic, were it not for the existence of a profound mystery underlying the whole situation. In spite of the unabashed intrigues and Olympian disregard for the uplift of the common folk, this trinity in the U.P. Congress continues to hold its mass base intact. What can be its magic? Maybe, in India too it is a permissive society.

SEPTEMBER 26, 1970

Kerala Conundrum

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

BEGINNING with the first general election in 1952, the system has had nothing to give the Kerala electorate. Save for a strange exception in 1957, when the CPI won power outright, no party got a clear majority in any of the seven elections in the Kerala area since 1952. The only viable single-party government Kerala ever got was during the 28-month communist interlude in 1957-59. Mrs Indira Gandhi, as Congress President, and her colleagues could not engineer the two defections needed to topple the Namboodiripad Ministry which survived every vote in the Assembly. The Ministry went out, not because it had lost the House majority but because the Centre could not countenance it. For the first, and the last time to date, the law and order provision in the Constitution was invoked to dismiss a Ministry that still had a House majority. The law and order situation was contrived through an extra-constitutional agitation sanctioned on the sly by Mrs Gandhi.

Last week's poll in Kerala underlined the total irrelevance of the system to one of the most sophisticated electorates in the country. Bizarre combinations of diverse political groups and parties as was witnessed in Kerala point to the constraints of an irrelevant system. On either side, openly or secretly, there was one or two Congress parties, one communist party, one or more of them "socialist" parties, and the Muslim League on one side was balanced by another communal party, the Jana Sangh, on the other. Communism mingled with a vengeance with communalism. The outcome was equally bizarre.

The mini-front got minified further, its tally slumping from 60 to 38. The CPI lost some five seats, the Muslim League a couple of them.

Yet the Congress-R which had a measly six seats in the outgoing Assembly improved its tally to 32. The Congress-R needed the support of the mini-front parties to rehabilitate itself but the CPI and the Muslim League had hoped to fatten on the Congress strength. In Malabar, where the Congress had lost every one of the 48 seats in 1967 and had polled 38 per cent of the vote, its alliance with the Muslim League and the CPI isolated the Marxists in some 15 constituencies. The Naxalite disruption cost the Marxists a few more seats. Yet the Marxist showing was impressive. Its vote was up by seven lakhs net, though its front this time was a narrower one. The percentage of its vote went up from 23 to 24.1. The minifront-Congress-R alliance polled 3.4 million votes and the Marxist front, again a narrower one, polled 3.1 million votes.

The Marxists have to thank themselves if they feel defrauded. Mr Namboodiripad's party cannot vote for Mr V. V. Giri in the Presidential election, prop Mrs Gandhi's minority government in Parliament, vote with it on every major issue and yet expect the Kerala electorate to reject her party and her friends. Mrs Gandhi hinted at an alliance with the CPI for the 1972 polls and during the campaign, asked the electorate to strengthen her hands. That amounted to asking for support to the CPI and the Muslim League. The Marxist belligerence towards the Congress came too late in the day, after a bout of unmitigated equivocation. At the time of the Congress split, the CPI-(M)'s stakes in Kerala and West Bengal were high. It was still running the ministries there and feared that if Mrs Gandhi lost, the Syndicate-dominated Centre would snipe at these ministries. But the Marxists were manoeuvred out of office in both

the States. If it is haunted by a fear of "encirclement and suppression" its own opportunism is to blame.

Mrs Gandhi's problems in Kerala are just beginning. Mr Jagjivan Ram does not favour participation in a coalition with the CPI or the Muslim League. Well, the Congress had the same inhibition about the League back in 1960. After winning the election with the support of the PSP and the League, the Congress ditched the Muslim leadership when it came to ministry-formation. The League was appeased for the moment with the Speakership of the Assembly. The Congress-Muslim League relations came under a strain and it took ten years of desperate effort for the Congress to woo the League back into its fold. The loss of two important League strongholds to Congress-O independents suggests that the Congress-R did not work wholeheartedly for the League candidates. Keeping the Muslim League out is a problem but both Mrs Gandhi and Mr Jagjivan Ram are agreed on the need to quarantine the League at the ministry-making stage. Mr Achutha Menon, as the leader of the mini-front which is a bigger force than the Congress-R, might be justified in staking his claim for Chief Ministership. Mrs Gandhi would not mind Mr Achutha Menon heading the ministry. But not the State party unit or Mr Jagjivan Ram. Again, sharing office with the CPI is not unacceptable to Mrs Gandhi but Mr Jagjivan Ram has his own views on it. Support to a ministry including the League is no problem for the Congress leadership but participation in a ministry along with the League would expose the party to a Jana Sangh onslaught in the Hindi belt. The Congress-R has the choice of participating in a ministry with unlike-minded parties constituting an opportunist combination or propping a minority ministry.

Impact Elsewhere

The Kerala election, no doubt, would have its impact on West Bengal politics. Mrs Gandhi is credited with a master plan, drawn up in

consultation with Mr Bhupesh Gupta or some other commissar, for a snap poll in West Bengal. The pattern of alliance is predictable. The Congress-R, Bangla Congress, CPI and some other political nondescripts are to confront the Marxist-led constellation at the most opportune moment for Mrs Gandhi. Knowledge of this will make the Marxist leadership desperate and force them into supporting any move to topple Mrs Gandhi in Parliament. But will that rehabilitate the leadership in the eyes of the following, even in Kerala? No doubt the Marxists have emerged the first party in Kerala if Independents who won their support are also taken into account. In terms of votes, the performance is more than creditable. But the party's credibility has suffered. It has to declare more precisely its attitude to united fronts, its attitude to the Congress-R and to an alternative government at the Centre.

In the wake of the Kerala elections, the CPI will mount pressure on Mrs Gandhi for a left-of-centre coalition in New Delhi that would exclude the Marxists. Mrs Gandhi is already in favour of it but here again, Mr Jagjivan Ram would like to carry the PSP with him and not the CPI. The charge of the Congress-O, Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh that Mrs Gandhi depends on the CPI and her Government is becoming more and more servile to the Soviet Union will stick still better now.

Time was when other parties ganged up to defeat the Congress but now the Congress-R is forced to seek allies to defeat the Marxists in two States and the Jana Sangh in three or four States. It is a measure of the fragmentation in Indian politics and the decline in all-India logic. With every election, the share of all-India parties in the total vote would go down and the regional parties would become more and more relevant. Mrs Gandhi is content to survive on the basis of makeshift alliance, with ad hoc strategies and with the support of left communalism.

Sep^rember 20, 1970

Meet Dr Habbash

A. K. ESSACK

THE Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) grabbed the headlines of the powerful Western press for a whole week as a result of its spectacular and unprecedented mass hijacking involving five planes. The PFLP has been reviled and its action condemned, even by countries like the UAR. Its members are now being hounded, along with others, in Jordan. In the June skirmishes between the guerillas and King Hussein's troops, it was the PFLP and the PDF (Palestine Democratic Front) that bore the brunt of the attack, as they are doing now.

The Palestinians as part of the Arab world are overwhelmingly Moslem, but Dr Habbash, leader of the PFLP, is of orthodox Christian parentage. This commando group, described as left-wing and radical, is part of the unified Arab command consisting of ten commando groups established in May this year.

In a remarkable interview with Oriana Fallaci, a medical doctor like Dr Habbash and a journalist of repute, Dr Habbash explained his family background, his subsequent metamorphosis, the programme, policy and strategy of his organisation. He said: I was humiliated by the events of 1948, but that did not affect my life very much. I was 22 then, lived near Jerusalem and was spared the fate of refugees. I buried myself in medicine as the only means of making myself useful to humanity and also as a means of applying my socialism. I had become a socialist in the last years of my college and it was in 1967 that they (Israelis) came. I don't know how to explain this; what this still means for us not to have a home, not to have a nation, or anyone who cares...they forced us to flee. It is a picture that haunts me and that I'll never forget...thirty thousand human beings, walking weeping, screaming in terror; some people fell by the wayside, some ne-

ver got up again. It was terrible."

Replying to Fallaci's question why PFLP specialises in acts of terrorism, and why should they impose this war on Europeans, Dr Habbash said that in a war one has to establish scientifically who one's enemies are. In this war Israel is not their only enemy. "Our enemy is Israel, plus the Zionist movement which controls many of the countries which support Israel plus imperialism. If we had to face Israel alone the problem would have been almost a simple one. But we have to stand against whoever supports Israel militarily, politically, economically and ideologically. They include the U.S. and almost every country of Europe...those few planes are worth the burning of two kibbutzim, for they force people to ask what is going on, so they get to know our tragic situation."

When Fallaci pointed out that Italy is not used as a Jewish base, nor is Germany, France or Switzerland and wanted to know where they want to stop Dr Habbash said that "what we want is a war like the war in Vietnam. We want a Vietnam war not only for just Palestine, but throughout the Arab world...the revolutionary forces in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan will rise to our side in a total war. Our struggle has barely begun."

Questioned about the differences with Al Fatah Habbash admitted that although they fight on the same side of the barricade their position is different, for they (PFLP) never accept money from reactionary sources; they never accept money that stinks of American oil...the worst obstacles have always been those placed in their path by Arab reactionaries, like Saudi Arabia, or Lebanon with its rotten government, and there is Jordan whose King is ready to recognise Israel. "We have been collecting money from amongst ourselves, but if the financial problem

SEPTEMBER 26, 1970

becomes critical we will take the money from those who have it. We will take it, not ask for it...it is we who give the revolutionary momentum to Palestine, not Al Fatah. The real people, the proletarian masses follow our lead."

How is it, asked Fallaci, that the PFLP attracts mostly intellectuals and bourgeois? Dr Habbash agreed that numerically they are not strong. But he pointed out that it was not enough to have proletarians in the party. "What counts is a proletarian ideology and a proletarian programme. A 100 men with clear revolutionary idea fight better than a 1,000 mercenaries (PFLP commandos are not paid, while those of Al Fatah receive a regular salary)."

Questioned if the PFLP ever engage in military operations costly in terms of lives, Dr Habbash asserted: Certainly. 85% of the military activity in Israel is our doing, not Al Fatah's. In Gaza we have fought a battle which Moshe Dayan himself admitted was the worst of all that took place in Israeli territory, the battle of Madhazi."

Replying to the question as to who their friends are Dr Habbash said that the goal of the struggle is not only that of restoring the nationhood of Palestine, but to transform it into a socialist state as well. They are nationalist and socialist in equal measure. The PFLP, he said, proceeds within the framework of socialist ideology. "By 1967 we had understood the undeniable truth that to liberate Palestine, we had to follow the Chinese and Vietnamese example." What about the USSR? Dr Habbash agreed that the Soviet Union is a friend. But they don't appreciate it when in the Security Council the USSR moves "peace resolutions, that are nothing but disguised traps. We will never agree to any peaceful compromise. And China sees eye to eye on this issue."

Asked about military training in China Dr Habbash denied that PFLP have any such thing. "The Front trains its soldiers by itself in our camps. We teach more than shooting. Our recruits amongst other

things have to learn Hebrew."

Dr Habbash, the humanitarian doctor transformed into a commando leader, ended this interview with the following words: Once you have seen this (suffering and death), your heart and brain are transformed. What's the point of healing a sick body when

such things can happen? One must change the world, do something, kill if necessary, kill even at the risk of becoming inhuman. you can't understand us, perhaps you find us despicable; but you will understand us some day. You won't despise us then, you will be on our side 100%."

Taming The Rivers

TARUN CHATTERJEE

"WE flew three hundred miles across the Yangtse floods. One evening under a darkening sky I sat on a dyke looking across a boundless expanse of water...I heard that in the last Yangtse floods...in 1931, three million people died of starvation...I have heard of the great battle this year (1954) when the industrial cities of the middle Yangtse were saved by a dyke on which 300,000 people worked night and day. This time no one went hungry. In the mountains we had seen irrigation works built three hundred years before the birth of Christ. Neglected for centuries, they were being redeveloped. The age-old problem of China's rivers—China's "sorrow"—as they call it—had at last been solved by people...in a way never before witnessed on this earth." Thus wrote John Horner, a leader of the British working class 15 years ago.

Even earlier, a great civil engineering project was started in the Huai river basin in 1949 (the year of Liberation). It removed the flood menace from an area as large as France and Germany taken together. "It is a fantastic story...of a great battle against natural forces...won by the combined efforts of more than two million people working...sometimes with the most primitive equipment, to safeguard the future of a land, which is, in every sense, *their own*", noted Hewlett Johnson, the late Dean of Canterbury.

"China's sorrow", as the people called the Yellow and Yangtse river basins from Langchow to Shanghai, bisect nine provinces. In their sweep

up to the sea they encompass more than 40% of the total arable land and a third of the total population. But the Yellow (Hwang-Ho) river has been conquered, thanks to a system of water conservancy, irrigation networks, checking of erosion of the two sides of the river, ensuring of sufficient precipitation through belts of afforestation and generation of hydro-power for agriculture and towns. The main reservoir holds 3540 crores of cubic metre of water which flows through the irrigation ditch network to irrigate 6,667,000 acres of land. The main power house there has enormous pipes of 22 feet diameter. Its 8 turbines together produce 600 crore kilowatt-hours of electricity, more than enough for industrialisation (including agricultural machines industry) and electrification of agriculture (electromotive tractors and supply of power for lighting the towns and villages) in the central Yellow river valley. The flow speed of water for rotating the turbines is 250 cubic metres per second. The San Men Project has completely changed the face of an area inhabited by some 8-9 crores of people.

What was the history of this "China's sorrow" during the last three thousand years? In this rather long span of history she broke fifteen hundred times through man-made primitive cordons—innumerable crudely built dyke made of stones, sackfuls of sand and pebbles carried to the building sites by endless streams of villagers. But there was another source of calamity. The river, like the Padma, has changed its course twenty-six times. In fact this river kissing the

Chinese Wall in Langchow was a scourge for the people. Speaking literally life in China was virtually a national struggle to control and utilise her wild rivers—mainly two—the Yellow in the north and the Yangtse in the south with the Pearl (Huai) river in between. Too many long ranges of dark green hills endlessly looped and contoured by terraces over-grown with cereals attract a tremendous amount of condensed water from the dark clouds which sweep down in a terrific spate on these rivers along with eroded silt, thus compelling them to swirl and sweep along, their surface-level incessantly rising owing to constant addition of the down-flow plus deposition of the eroded silt since ages. One Chinese mythical tale relates how a certain king Yu—a man well versed in engineering—wielded his spade himself until his whole physical strength was exhausted, to dig ditches and channels and that was the origin of his fame. Many primitive dykes, still standing after recent thorough repairs and overhauling, were attributed to him.

The river, like the Ganga in Lachmanjhula, comes out thundering through the spillway in brown foam. The drainage basin is rather arid with an average rainfall per year of only 1.57 inches. But all this rainfall—however scanty—within a very short period results in sharp variations in the flow rate, the yearly average ranging from 35,200 to 292,600 gallons per second. The maximum so far reached is 7,810,000 gallons. The silt being sedimented through millennia has raised the river bed so much that in many places it is higher than the bank areas. This has been often calamitous. But the people of the area like the boatmen of the Padma were never cowed down. They were constantly building a series of dykes which the government of new China has meticulously preserved and renovated to make the river flow as if through a raised trough across the basin.

Before the PRC came to power nothing but patchwork after calamity was done. But the silt continued to accumulate, clogging the passage of water. A huge quantity of grainy loess (fertile soft soil) eroded

by torrential tropical rain on the middle reaches of the river gashed the hilly basin with gullies and canyons, even a thousand feet deep. This highly fertile grainy soil—the 'Good Earth' so to say—was a total waste. The only redeeming feature was the series of ancient dykes—with a total length of 1,200 miles. But they were of no use in solving the acute problem of silting of 1,380 million tons of eroded soil per year (enough to erect a nine-yard-wide dyke belt encircling the equator at least twenty-tree times). The sedimentation of eroded soil led to the river being called the "Elevated River" because in some areas its surface is from 10 to 30 feet higher than the surrounding areas. The new government has kept the dykes in good order. The first steps for flood control were started as early as 1946, in the liberated areas adjacent to the river. 'All the dykes' holes and cracks were sealed, turning them into a restored rampart against the onslaught of the deluge. After liberation, 170 million cubic metres of earth have been used to plug and plaster it, together with afforestation along both the banks to prevent erosion.

The Yellow River (San Men) Project has one dam at the confluence of each tributary with canals for diverting excess water from their reservoirs.

Long-Term Plan

These measures though stupendous, were not enough for a fundamental solution of the periodic problem. As soon as the Sino-Soviet Technical Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1950, Chinese geologists, architects, hydrologists and experts, including a group of Soviet engineers who had taken part in building the Dneiper Dam Project and were planners of the world's biggest hydro-electric project in Bratsk, Siberia, worked together for six years to draw up an overall long-term water problem solution scheme. The plan, now at the final stage of implementation has 44 specialised dams in the middle reaches and two more in the lower. Four of them are multi-purpose—for flood prevention, irrigation and power generation. Most of

the silt's way forward is barred at the very source by 24, on the main tributaries in the middle reaches.

The middle reaches, the source of silt, which pass through Shenghsi, are divided in four sectors in conformity with their own specific natural characteristics. In the hilly Kansu province up above Langchow the river rushes down along steep slopes. The energy is harnessed mainly for power generation, feeding the quickly developing industries (almost all of China's industrial regions are situated not far from rivers) including the city of Paotow placed at the northern bend—now the centre of nuclear weapons as well as iron and steel industries.

The second sector of the Yellow River battlefield runs through Inner Mongolia. The river here is very wide, like the Meghna, but precipitation being scanty, it is made to serve mainly irrigation and navigation.

The third sector in Shansi, though interspersed with steep gorges, was handicapped by adverse geographical factors for power generation. Much regulating work is being done in the upper reaches in order to make the site suitable for large reservoirs for hydro-power houses.

The fourth sector, in the Honan province, also with many steep gorges serves the purpose of power generation quite satisfactorily. Sian, the famous city, where Chiank Kai-shek was captured during the civil war, is a neighbouring industrial centre in San Men, fed by the river.

The vast lowland around the port of Tientsin behind which lies Peking remained partly submerged throughout the year overgrown with reeds. The crop in the remaining part used to be swept away by periodic floods, adding to the soil at the same time salt i.e. alkali (as often happens in the Sunderbans area). In 1938 the Chiang government deliberately broke some dykes on the plea of "halting Japanese advance". This was done without any warning to the inhabitants or any plan for their evacuation. The result—the worst such disaster so far in Chinese history—was 890,000 lives lost, 12½ million homeless.

The next major flood struck in

1954 when the Communist Party was in power. The Party issued as slogan of the day, "Utilise and reform nature, change water from a terror to a boon". Old methods of patchwork were replaced by methods of harnessing. Cash came from the State, manpower from the collective farms; 4,000 middle school graduates were trained in dam and sluice gate construction as well as cultivation of rice. Then they were sent to the site to take charge of this stupendous operation on a war footing without quotation marks.

In 1956, 660,000 acres were ameliorated despite heavy floods and 330,000 tons of rice were produced on them. In 1957 660,000 people rescued 1.55 million acres of which 283,000 acres of the lowest land were transformed into reservoirs. In 1958 paddy covered 833,000 acres from which 35,000 tons of rice were exported for buying machinery. During these three years 26,447 canals were dug and 6,000 sluice-gates were erected. Nature was utilised and reformed, water changed from being a terror to benefit. In this chain the most important link is San Men in the second sector. The work there was completed one year ahead of schedule but as the generators from Russia could not be delivered ahead of schedule, the otherwise completed project had to lie idle for a year in the power generation sphere.

Despite the intensity of periodical floods in the Yellow River basin, North China's water resources fall much short of actual needs because there arid and desert areas predominate (Sinkiang, Gobi etc.). South China has water enough and to spare which periodically ravaged the Yangtse basin. And the Yangtse is a much larger and powerful river than the Yellow River. 1959-1961 was the worst chapter in New China's agriculture mainly due to devastating floods in the Yangtse basin. Unexpected and unprecedented heavy rain and drought continuously for three successive years put the country under trials and tribulations. Harvest failure led to acute food shortage in 1959. By the end of 1960, 70% of agricultural land failed totally to deliver the goods and 1961 fol-

lowed suit. Add to this the tearing off of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1950 by Khrushchev, and withdrawal of Russian technicians just at that moment, and the picture will be complete. In fact from the point of view of hostility towards China this act was much more damaging than the gloating of the bourgeois press over China's distress. It should be mentioned here that in order to import capital machinery for industrialisation, mechanisation and electrification of farming, China has to depend wholly on export of agricultural produce. Failure of harvest in three consecutive years compelled the government to slow down industrialisation. A big chunk of exportable grains had to be distributed at home. Her foreign trade was cut down by 25%, the foreign exchange reserves dwindled owing to large-scale purchase of grains from Canada and Australia not only for immediate distribution but also for stockpiling for emergency and for Vietnam. The Western press immediately raised a hullabaloo about mass starvation in China and laid the main blame on the communes.

But the commune network has been playing a signal role in the flood control-irrigation-electrification projects.

The Yangtse

The Yangtse Control Project has dwarfed its Yellow river counterpart. This great river's total power potential allowing losses, is about 58 crore kwt. Ten thousand experts worked on this scheme, including 300 Chinese scientists and engineers.

It has been calculated that of the country's total river power, 72% is in South West, less than 2% in North China and Inner Mongolia, 40% in Yangtse, 21.5 in Tibet and 6 in the Yellow River.

The Yangtse, the country's largest water power potential, has a drainage area of 694,980 sq. miles, a flow of over 35,513,400 million cubic feet per annum and a water-head of 16,000 feet. It is the fourth in the world in the volume of flow and third in water potential. The highest landmark of the Yangtse Project is the raising of the water level by 190 to 210 yards,

enabling ships of 10,000 tons displacement to go as far as Chungking all the year round. The tributaries too contain tremendous water power.

Every July the Yangtse broadens at each point of confluence with its tributaries and becomes turbulent. Flood water rises more than 30 feet (like the *Mahanadi* and its tributary the *Katjuri* bordering the north and south of Cuttack) above the surrounding land. This annual phenomenon broke dykes, resulting in disaster. The Chinese government in conjunction with Soviet technicians almost completed the arresting of floods as early as 1952. There appeared an immense battery of 54 massive lock-gates, each as long as a cricket pitch, coupled by powerful revolving girders to the axis, admitting or excluding the water at will. The battery stretches nearly two-thirds of a mile, connected by a vast asphalt roadway to the river. It is always ready to receive flood waters as they rise and to conduct them to the flood diversion basin, then they are permitted to flow back sluggishly through other mighty gates to the lower reaches or into the Tung Ting Lake. These hundreds of miles long gates and dykes, for the construction of which most contractors would demand several years, took, from first to last, less than three months to complete, one month's work being done in torrents of rain. Including the PLA squads, 300,000 men took part in the job. The devastating hundred days of 1954 when the river surface rose 94 feet along 84 miles of the dyke will never be repeated. On that occasion 289,830 people working to repair the dykes, in some points even threw themselves together like a human wall on the cracks in neck-deep water and stayed like that for long hours. Some 110 people died from exhaustion.

Let us mention the San Men Project before conclusion. Its height is 384 feet (Grand Coulee—550 feet), base 312 feet (Grand Coulee 500 feet. Both are *gravity* dams). The American project took eight years to build while the Chinese less than four. San Men holds more water than its U.S. counterpart. Subsequently ano-

ther 46 smaller reservoirs have been built on the headwaters according to a "Step-Ladder Plan" which means conversion of the fall of the river

into a series of controlled steps.

In comparison with the Yangtze Project, nearing completion, the San Men will look like a toy.

Frankly Speaking

SANJOY

THE Kerala election results were expected to go in favour of the CPM, and as the expected tends to be rather uninteresting, this writer did not bother much about AIR news. There were other jobs to be done. But at about 1 p.m. an excited official of the West Bengal Information Department broke in with the news that of the six results announced till then, none had gone to the CPM. Somehow, though it was too early, it sounded like a portent. Other people discussed the news, and, as in the event of any bad news about the CPM, the inevitable banter was heard—is it an occasion for *Frontier* to celebrate?

Leave out *Frontier*, wherein quite a few have been predicting an utter rout of the Congress(R) and its pimps. But how should one, rather critical of the leadership of the CPM, react? One reaction would be—and this writer is prepared now to agree—to hell with elections, and it does not matter which side gets a better berth in the inferno that is India. But since elections do take place and large numbers of people turn out to vote—oftener than once in five years—one cannot maintain this lofty attitude of indifference.

It has to be admitted, despite what the CPM Politbureau will pronounce this week, that the Party has suffered another severe setback. It will not do to be content with the percentage of the pro-CPM vote. In the electoral system that prevails here, percentages do not matter. In 1967 the Congress polled a little over 35 per cent of the votes in Kerala and got 6 seats. In West Bengal in 1969 over 40 per cent but 55 seats. No one is impressed by percentage if the party does not sit in the Secretariat. And

after 1967, when the wave of anti-Congressism brought bewildered leftists to power in several States, even the leftists do not care much about percentages if these leave them out in the rains. It is power, or the semblance of power, that matters.

This writer will rejoice if the Kerala reverse makes the rank and file of the CPM in West Bengal reconsider the policies of their leadership. "Elections or revolution"—it is time for this puerile slogan to be muted. And it is time for the rank and file, among whom are some of the finest elements in West Bengal, to find out who their real friends and real enemies are, and act. We shall rejoice if the middle-class leaders fail to bluff them with their occasional fake militancy. As things are, it is too early to rejoice in a grim State like West Bengal.

Quite some time ago a West German journalist, youngish, curious and knowledgeable, visited *Frontier*. He wanted to know what the reactions of the people would be if some agencies built an underground railway for Calcutta. Who would bear the cost? he was asked. Hesitating for a few seconds he said it would be a sort of gift. As it sounded too good to be true we asked him who the benevolent sponsors could be. He replied: West Germany, the USSR and the USA (through some international agency). The object of this gesture, he said, was stability in this nerve-centre.

We forgot all about it. Then Mr Nanda came to Calcutta and made his surprise announcement that the circular railway scheme was no good, what was wanted was an underground railway. It was then that we

remembered the West German.

Now the Russians are sending experts to study the feasibility and cost of the scheme. The Russians are magnificent Metro builders, though their obsession with grandeur handicapped a wide extension of the scheme. The obsession was understandable: the first socialist State in the world must do something unique.

It will not be possible to go in for the baroque in Calcutta. After the recent floods in the city many people would wonder whether a tube station, if ever built, would survive long in Calcutta. The habits of the people should be considered, as well as the efficiency of the administrators. When surface conditions are beyond description, can any city go in for an underground railway system? However, it may help the homeless, and those who have no sanitary arrangements. Perhaps political elements also.

The Russians are coming. How far behind are the West Germans and the Americans we do not presume to know. Such concerted large-heartedness, however, is alarming.

When the well-known editor of *Basumati* was superannuated overnight did the proprietors of the paper think that they would have a merry time?

For, unlike the editor of an English daily who was sacked without ceremony, Mr Vivekananda Mukher has thousands of admirers and political supporters. He is known to change the political direction of his writing—'freedom is recognition of necessity'—but no one denies that he is a forceful writer who has survived many vicissitudes. The present popularity of *Basumati* is due to him. So, why do the owners want to get rid of him?

It is rumoured that Mr Mookherjee did not hesitate to supply many facts about the paper to the Central Bureau of Investigation which was looking into the affairs of an ex-Minister of the Union Government connected with the paper. The facts are rather shady. There is enough evidence for prosecution, but some-

how the Prime Minister, it is reported, does not want the enquiry to be followed up. The ex-Minister who knows he is at the mercy of the PM, can no longer gang up against her. And what Mrs Gandhi is interested in is power, and not the practices of a man who once held Cabinet rank. Power, Mrs Gandhi knows, sometimes grows out of the files of the CBI.

The fact that there is no immediate threat may have revived the guts of the ex-Minister, so much so that he decided to get rid of the editor. Under pressure, the management had to withdraw the notice.

* *

Duplicity rules the day. And police duplicity is so brazen these days that people do not bother. How would you expect the police to act when they have prior information that a police station is going to be attacked? The whole area would be surrounded and look like a battle scene. But in Krishnagar three or four officers, with revolvers, went about in a jeep, looking for the conspirators. They had a brief encounter with unseen enemies in the dark in a 'jungle' or a mango-grove. Then they found a body. Later, however, the father of the dead man complained that his son had been arrested in the morning and he suspects that he must have beaten to death in the police station. The District Magistrate has ordered an inquiry. Between an enquiry and the report...well, you know.

In this instance the West Bengal police were involved. What is curious however is that the CPM, while demanding the withdrawal of the hated CRP, tends generally to keep quiet

about the atrocities of the West Bengal police. Is it because complaints about the latter may lead to a demand for the withdrawal of the Calcutta police contingent, armed and in plain clothes, who guard the house of the former Deputy Chief Minister? Or maybe the CPM thinks that the local police can be held check—except for occasional rampages, for instance, near the Assembly—when it returns to power and the Home portfolio.

* *

Contrary to lurid forecasts about the fate of the passengers of the planes hijacked by Palestinian commandos, there has been no complaint of ill-treatment. The BOAC hostesses said the treatment was marvellous. The children and the commandos got on very well, the former hunting for guerilla autographs and insisting on playing football with their captors. The air was tense, though, with tanks of the Jordanian army ringing the desert airfield.

The hijack Arabs belong to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—an 'extremist' group suspended by the Central Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation after they had blown up the planes and readmitted when King Hussain set up a military government to break the commando organisations. Both the leaders of the PFLP, George Habbash, and his deputy in charge of operations, Wadi Haddad are Christians and doctors. Dr Habbash, who passed out of the medical school of the American University of Beirut, writes a special correspondent of *The Times*, was one of the most brilliant students of his generation. The correspondent goes on to say that one of the attractions of the PFLP to young Arabs is that it offers nothing but blood, tears and sweat. It is not contaminated by the rivalries—or by the cash—of Arabs governments. Like the 19th century Russian anarchists they derive an almost mystical satisfaction from knowing that they are a small band cut off from the world, obeying rules and standards of their own making.

Tripura

Exit Maharaja

BY A CORRESPONDENT

THAT the Maharaja of Tripura has resigned from the Congress Parliamentary Party in protest against introduction of the Privy Purses Abolition Bill seems to have caused very little reaction in political circles here. What is surprising is that both the wings in the ruling Congress, one 'aggrieved' and the other led by Mr Sachindra Lal Singh, the Chief Minister, are trying to maintain an eerie silence over this episode. In view of the role the Maharaja once played in vitalising the Congress in Tripura, which was cornered almost to near obscurity until the last general election, it seems unlikely that he will let the matter be given such a silent burial.

The Maharaja of Tripura did not enter Tripura politics exactly in the manner his counterparts in other States did—his entry was rather fortuitous. It was at a time when the future of the Congress in Tripura was so clouded in uncertainty that it needed a man of his stature to counter the communist influence in the tribal areas, then at its peak under the leadership of the formidable Mr Dasarath Deb Barma. For that matter, the Centre also thought of the Maharaja as the only saviour and put the highest premium on him for the survival of the Congress in Tripura. At that time there was no political party in Tripura openly championing the cause of revival of the pristine glory in what is today known to be its post independence form. The Congress bosses also, for their part, promised His Highness all help to salvage the medieval image of a maharaja as the direct representative of God.

After the ground had thus been prepared for the Maharaja to make his political debut, he extensively toured areas he had never seen before, chaperoned by Congress bosses. Of course he did not have to take much trouble; he had only to make himself available

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for 'Raj darshan' by people, while the Congress bosses did the speaking all the time. They made every effort to work up the vacuous emotions of the unsophisticated tribal people and to deceive them into believing the myth left by the Maharajas of bygone days. But still the task was not that easy. On the other side there was Mr Dasarath Deb Barma, the undisputed communist leader of Tripura, who wielded unchallenged influence among the tribal people. His popularity rose to such heights that after independence he was placed by his people in the position of a maharaja, figuratively though. If he could be ousted from his position, the Congress bosses thought, the communist influence in Tripura could be resisted effectively, and to get this done a real maharaja was needed. By placing the Maharaja of Tripura as Mr Deb Barma's rival in the 1967 general election, the Congress wanted to serve two purposes initially: First, to rouse the people's sentiment by exploiting the ex-ruler's royal background and at the same time his tribal roots; second, to establish the legitimacy of a real Maharaja fighting a 'fake' Maharaja. However fictitious it may sound, people were simply asked to distinguish between a 'real' and a 'fake' Maharaja before casting their votes. Moreover, Mr Sachindra Lal Singh's genius for reversing things overnight also helped a great deal in this direction. And to everybody's surprise and shock, the Maharaja of Tripura won this prize seat defeating his only rival, Mr Deb Barma. The Maharaja's victory not only saved the Congress in Tripura from imminent doom, but also helped it considerably to gain some tribal pockets so long dominated by the communists.

Needless to say, till the other day the Maharaja's role in the shaping of

the Congress politics in Tripura used to be valued much. The ruling Congress in Tripura as well as at the Centre always made it a point to placate the Maharaja by all means, although personally Mr Sachindra Lal Singh never liked his playing even the second fiddle in domestic affairs. Soon Mr Singh began to find it convenient to concentrate power in his own hands somewhat ignoring the Maharaja. After some time the relationship between the two came to such a point that the Centre could not but take notice of it. In the meantime the Congress at the Centre fell apart, with the Maharaja of Tripura, among others, joining the Indira group. The faction in the ruling Congress in Tripura led by Mr Tarit Mohan Dasgupta, known as 'aggrieved', found in it an opportunity to outmanoeuvre the almighty Sachindra by denouncing him as pro-Syndicate. Whatever weakness Sachindra might have for the Syndicate, his advantage was that, being a Union territory, Tripura had no voting right in the Presidential election. So he could afford to remain silent about this campaign till the election result was out without having to commit himself to any side. In the election battle the Indira group won and the rumpus against Mr Sachin Singh went on more vigorously than before. Mr Singh first tried to keep his house in order by prodding the 'aggrieved'. But when no amount of prodding could make the aggrieved see eye to eye with him, he resorted to intimidation. The situation then reached such a piquant stage, foreboding an imminent showdown, that Mr S. D. Sharma, the ruling Congress General Secretary, had to rush to Tripura to make a thorough probe into Congress affairs. To supplement this Mrs Gandhi also used the Maharaja as her emissary. He met both the groups separately, though his sympathy, for obvious reasons, was always with the aggrieved. Without wasting any time to convince the Maharaja, the embarrassed Sachin Singh straightaway went to Delhi to declare his allegiance to Mrs Gandhi and came

back a victor, boastfully telling his aggrieved comrades that unlike them he was pro-Indicate in deeds, not in words. Since then the inner-party struggle in the ruling Congress in Tripura has been going on behind a facade of unity and has now come to the front.

The 'aggrieved' Congressmen in Tripura must have been upset by the Maharaja's quitting the Congress Parliamentary Party. They pinned great hopes on him as an instrument for outmanoeuvring Mr Sachindra Lal Singh. But now that the Maharaja has gone against Mrs Gandhi, Mr Sachindra Lal Singh can quite comfortably dispense with him. He is now very much an Indicate man which the aggrieved Congressmen would never like him to be. Besides, Mrs Gandhi's announcement in Parliament that Tripura's demand for Statehood has been accepted in principle, has also been timed with an eye to what might happen on the Congress front in Tripura with the Maharaja's exit from the Party. This has given Mr Sachindra Lal Singh an opportunity to indulge in mock heroics about his leadership, though the leftist parties also have made it a common issue along with the ruling Congress. Now Mr Singh is trying to make an illusion of what he claims to be the achievement of his own leadership, however shaky the reasoning. Hasn't Tripura's demand for Statehood been conceded without a Manipur or Telengana-type agitation being necessary?

When the whole situation turned in favour of Mr Singh, he started trying to be as ruthless as his capacity permits, as a step towards consolidating his position. Within a

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very short time he has turned Tripura into a police State. He seems determined to stifle even the slightest voice of dissent. Students and Government employees have lately become the target of all sorts of police repression. Whenever they try to register their grievances with the Government, they are dealt with in a manner typical of fascist rulers. Perhaps in a bid to prove that agitation does not pay, Mr Singh is unsparingly seizing every opportunity to scare people by letting loose his vast police and CRP forces. To further tighten repressive measures, the Government has promulgated Section 144 throughout Agartala; it has banned public meetings and slogan-raising for an indefinite period. When the doors of educational institutions are virtually closed to students, when they cannot be assured of any employment even in the distant future, the Tripura Government expects them to remain passive and to take it all as something like a decree of God. When the bureaucratic machinery of the Government, which is now held in firmer grip by an ICS Lt. Governor, has been basically anti-employee, it wants its employees not to agitate or else to be prepared for dire consequences, such as termination of and suspension from service as a price for their 'audacity' to question the Government's authority to do whatever it likes. But the garrulous Sachindra Lal Singh would never tire of crying himself hoarse about socialism, often embellishing it with high-sounding philosophical gibberish.

"Copy Book" Examinations

BY A CORRESPONDENT

JADAVPUR University has been conducting its examinations in remarkable circumstances. Threatened by Naxalites who emphasised their point with an armed raid on the administrative block, this year's be-

lated engineering examinations seem to be taking place under an open general licence or corruption. Examinees openly claimed and obtained the right to copy from books. In other rooms, students who had walked out under Naxalite pressure, walked in again to finish their papers on the same terms. Even some leaders of the walk-out sat down with them. The practice of copying crosses party line with the utmost ease.

Fundamental causes like 'the system' apart, this situation may be explained in terms of a convergence of interests. Many students took advantage of the unsettled atmosphere caused by repeated postponements of examinations and closure of hostels. The University authorities, anxious to get the examinations over in a crisis year, anticipated and connived at this. A section of the Engineering Faculty, used for years to a defective system shared this attitude (and in fairness it must be stated that no clear alternative could be posed by others, short of stopping the examinations). Activists of the CPM in the University complete this peculiar parallelogram of forces. Bent on a prestige victory over the Naxalites, the CPM-led union not only failed to take a stand against corruption in examination halls, but almost certainly encouraged it.

Whether the CPI(ML) unit in the University objected to the examinations as such is not clear. They had talked of revenge on some leaders of the CPM group for their alleged complicity in the murder of two fellow-students. The tension rose as the Vice-Chancellor decided to consult the students about the programme of examinations, and the unions led by the CPM co-operated. At this stage, Naxalite posters and anonymous letters threatened to break up the examinations. To this, their political rivals, with the blessings of party colleagues among the teachers and office staff, gave a typical reply. Groups of outsiders, including local rowdies, enter and roam about the campus every day during the examina-

tions. At least one student leader of the CPM group has politely turned down his teachers' request to leave the outsiders outside. He need not be blamed for following Mr Promode Dasgupta who has stated more than once that his party's private army is ready to handle the Naxalites provided the police retire. The stage is now set for the other side to bring in its forces. The examinations may conclude in peace if the balance of terror holds.

to avoid.

No normal person on the campus relishes this doze of the Dasgupta doctrine. Though the Naxalites allege otherwise, the intrusion of outsiders was never sanctioned by the University. Neutral students clearly disapprove of it. Teachers, who had offered to stand by in case of trouble, resent the presence of these self-styled guardians of peace. Yet any attempt to stop it, except by the persuasion that has failed, might bring on the kind of clash everyone wants

Who has gained what in this looking-glass war remains to be seen. It is easy to point out to the CPI(ML) that blood-for-blood posters and tearing up examinees' answer-books are no coherent political reply to gangsterism or anything else. Nor could they really disrupt the examinations. Besides, their boycott of the unions and other activities helped to raise their rivals to a position of strength. However, they succeeded in making the CPM look like unprincipled toughs, with nothing to say whenever the image of two murdered boys is evoked. The fact that the examinations could continue only in abnormal conditions also gives the CPI(ML) propaganda a sharper sting. After all this, it will be no easy task to overcome either the two-way crisis of confidence between students and teachers, or a growing disappointment with the left in general.

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The "Nun-Running" Affair

The term "volunteers" and "vocations" as often applied to the unusually large number of young nuns in Kerala must be seen in the very special context of the woman's place in India and especially in the Kerala Catholic communities.

Approximately one third of Kerala's 20 million people are Christians, and half, or about 3 million, Catholics of various rites, Syrian-rite Catholics being the dominant sect. The Christian community claims to date back to the time of the apostles; in any case there is no disputing the fact that it is very old.

What is not generally known is that Christianity has done little to alter the inherent injustice of the social system that has reigned in India, and particularly in southern India, for centuries. Not only has the caste system continued to flourish among Kerala Christians; the social status of Christian women—with the exception of a small Western-educated elite—hardly differs from that of their Hindu counterparts.

A girl does not choose her husband. The choice is made by her parents or an elder brother and depends on the size of the dowry the family can afford. The majority of Kerala Christians being poor, the dowry system inflicts devastating hardship on them, as indeed it does on the Hindus, yet the Church hierarchy—contrary to what it has done in Africa—has never made the slightest attempt to express its reprobation.

The education and marriage of daughters place an intolerable burden on members of poor families above the outcaste level on the social scale, and large families are the rule. Moreover, girls may not do manual work, unless they belong to a very low caste, this being considered demeaning. Generally, however, they lack sufficient education to hold any other type of job.

Catholic parents may not send

their children to state-run "Hindu" schools without special permission from their bishop, which is rarely granted without risking excommunication. While Catholic schools run by the religious orders charge only modest tuition, this is still a considerable drain on a poor family's budget.

Girls who complete secondary education get their school-leaving certificate between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. Their level of academic achievement is rather low—hardly above that of a primary school diploma in Europe, but it enables some to become lay teachers in the convent schools where they were raised. They are paid a paltry wage which is generally below the government norm, low enough in its own right.

Since a few families can afford higher studies, the only solution, if they can scrape a dowry together, is marriage. If not, girls have no choice but to enter a convent, for spinsterhood is not tolerated, and is even considered a family disgrace. Knowing what a burden they are to their families, daughters often feel bitter humiliation. Nor are they likely to be inspired by the example of their mothers, married at sixteen, exhausted from continual childbearing and struggling desperately to keep the family going.

A religious vocation seems the safest and easiest way out, for the girls know they will never starve to death. Furthermore, priests, monks and nuns enjoy a high social standing in India and the desire to move up the social ladder is a factor in the relatively high proportion of Kerala young men and women who enter the orders, as seminary teachers readily acknowledge.

Accustomed to obedience, with no say in their future, reared in an atmosphere of narrow and sentimental piety, most girls are not put off by convent life. They know they will be spared from making decisions and shielded from poverty and life's hard

knocks. Consequently at the age of sixteen or seventeen a great many girls find they have a "vocation"—allow themselves to be guided by their parents or priests towards a convent.

A daughter's entry into a convent is celebrated by the family in much the same way as an engagement or wedding and from then on her fate is sealed. Any attempt to return would disgrace her family and probably ruin forever its chances of marrying her.

A novice who wants to leave the convent generally encounters fierce opposition from her own family and parish priest or the priests who placed her. This is compounded by the fear of social ostracism, and it takes tremendous courage to go through with it. If the superior of the convent wants to send her away the situation can become dramatic. Given no choice the girl may have a nervous breakdown and even try to kill herself. Often the superior has no other alternative but to hand her over to another order.

In Kerala many girls are recruited either indirectly by a priest or by nuns sent out on recruiting missions from other parts of India. In northern India in particular because the Christian population is sparse, local recruiting is impossible and chartered buses are sent out on "collection rounds".

Foreign congregations of European origin in the main, which are more highly esteemed than local congregations, take in most of these "vocations". Their living standards are higher and, because they are financed from abroad, they can offer better training facilities, including university courses and sometimes even studies in Europe or the United States. This is the ultimate aspiration in a country where no one is anyone unless he is foreign trained or has at least travelled abroad.

This desire for more complete training for later work, generally in teaching, started Indian nuns—the great majority of them Kerala on their exodus towards Europe. Then it was discovered, by Indian and foreign congregations alike, that training in Europe or the United States was far

cheaper than at home if the costs were borne by charitable institutions. Moreover it was better and the foreign diplomas brought added prestige.

The Indian orders began seeking contacts abroad. In many cases charitable organisations and foreign congregations responded with perfectly altruistic offers of help. At their own expense, they agreed to take in and train young Indian nuns always past the novitiate but sometimes under twenty—as their contribution to Indian economic development and the foreign missions.

Superiors and those in charge of the exchanges in Europe were surprised in many cases to find that the Indian nuns congratulated themselves on landing on a cushy job or regarded their European stay as an opportunity for social betterment. At the same time they often met with a great deal of willingness and a fierce desire to learn despite the handicap of a difficult psychological and cultural adjustment to European life.

There have, to be sure, been painful incidents when a gifted girl, provided she had no real vocation, shed her meekness and tried to leave the convent despite the pressure exerted from afar by her superiors and the bishop and, in some cases, on the scene by an Indian priest sent to keep watch over the flock.

Some European congregations, hearing of the large numbers of "vocations" in Kerala and seeing their own convents empty, appealed to the Indian orders for volunteers to enable them to continue their work. They undertook to train them at their expense, and their first thought may have been to help the Indian congregations.

Some of the priests engaged in recruiting in India or the orders themselves may have exacted financial guarantees before sending the "volunteers" on. The dispatch of large numbers of young Indian nuns to rapidly emptying German convents was denounced in the West German press a few years ago and caused a considerable stir. Some, it was revealed, were little more than children

and totally unprepared for what they found.

The *Sunday Times* article and the Vatican's subsequent clarification reveal that the basic problem remains unsolved. The Church does not seem to have found an answer. The incident that triggered the London newspaper's inquiry could perhaps be dismissed if all the blame could be laid on the questionable recruiting methods of one priest-whose personal guilt has yet to be proved.

Behind it, however, lies the scandal, particularly acute in Kerala, of a situation where local churches have gone along for centuries with an oppressive social system, human rights are unscrupulously ignored by priests and nuns claiming to act in the name of "the Church." Hopefully the thorough investigation promised by the Vatican will push past facile denials of wrongdoing to examine the basic problems raised by this curious incident. (C. Vaudeville in *Le Monde*).

The yen for higher education is strong in Kerala and many are the young men who enter the priesthood to be sent, sponsored by the church, to a foreign university. More often than not their main concern when they return is to find out where they can command the highest salary with their new degrees. These are enterprising men, highly intelligent and efficient, the type of men who would directly ring up Christ, if Christ had a listed number.

The most notorious instance of this kind of enterprise is connected with the scion of a Pentecost evangelical whose education in America was financed by American Pentecost activists. When communists first took power in Kerala in 1957, he saw his opportunity. He conjured up the bogey of an imminent communist take-over of India, reminded the Pentecost activists of their Christian duty and collected enough money to start a daily newspaper in Kerala complete with rotary press and new motor launches for distribution.

Since then he has been receiving a fat dollar check from America every month, now drives around in a limousine too big for his native town's—

roads. To sort out some income tax problems which cropped up, he promptly joined the then right faction of the ruling Congress party and is today one of the top leaders of the party in his state, waiting for the day when the musical chair game will give him his chance to fill the chief minister's seat. For the fund dispenser in America, he is still the selfless soldier for Christ. It's enough to convert Christ to Hinduism.

In the get-up-and-go atmosphere of Kerala therefore the principal driving forces are a desire for education, the quest for a good and secure job, plus a fascination with anything foreign. Whenever these are combined with an opportunity to serve God, thousands of Keralans form a queue. The "nun trade" provided just such an opportunity. Only from the Kerala angle, it was simply not possible to anything in it that suggested a trade. (T.J.S. George in *Far Eastern Economic Review*).

More of Malle

D. Padgaonkar: In the debate on the BBC affair in the Indian Parliament it was said that you had promised to show the films to the authorities in Delhi or here in Paris. What was the procedure involved?

Louis Malle: I would like to state as categorically as possible that I never signed anything, never committed myself to any control and never undertook to go through any censorship before anybody. Had I been asked to sign anything or give any word to this effect I would never have made the films...

D.P.: Reports from Delhi say that the Indian Embassy officials discreet-

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ly arranged matters with the ORTF authorities who consented to delete some of the more 'objectionable' parts of the films...

L.M.: All I can say is that this is a fabrication, a lie. This never took place...

D.P.: Would you say that your films are politically slanted? There have been accusations that they are good propaganda for Kanu Sanyal's Naxalites?

L.M.s When Calcutta was first shown in France my extreme left-wing friends violently criticised it. They looked forward to an apology for a revolution. Now I do think that a revolution is necessary and inevitable in India. But this is a personal opinion which does not emerge from the films. India needs a radical change based on an Indian version of Marxism similar to Maoism which is the Chinese version of Marxism. It will have to be adapted to India's specific economic and cultural conditions. I do not have the impression that the Indian communists today are capable of bringing about such a revolution...

...I'll tell you of a recent incident. After seeing Calcutta, the Director of the Cuban cinema came to me and asked me to do a similar film on Cuba. I told him that he didn't know what sort of film I'll be making. He answered: That's precisely why we want you to do it. After seeing Calcutta we know that you are not committed to any one. Films that have been made in Cuba so far were the work of people who sympathised with us exclusively. The result was propaganda.

D.P.: Do you think you could have made these films had India been a communist country?

L.M.: Certainly not. That is why I repeat my admiration for the authorities who gave me a *carte blanche*. No many countries in the world will allow film-makers such latitude. The Times of India News Service).

Letters

Retreat In Calcutta

That political affiliation got the better of academic objective was the impression which your leading article "Retreat In Calcutta" (September 5), left in many minds, for which it ridiculed the CPM's abandonment of massive demonstrations in Calcutta in August 31 it did not consider necessary to utter a word of protest against or condemn the Government's massive measures, including the deployment of the army which turned Calcutta into a war zone and ruthlessly trampled upon the most elementary rights of the people. That the call for resistance by a single party fighting against heavy odds could so much unnerve and perturb even the mighty Government at the Centre as to force it to make such unprecedented preparation more than fulfilled the object of CPM and a very large section of the people too despite your seeming unconcern about its significance and Calcutta being deprived of a "pleasure" of a blood bath on the occasion.

It has been said that the anger of the CPM over the Government's measures to prevent the party's massive demonstration and rally on Martyrs' day was not in accord with its failure to prevent the police firing in the Naxalbari area in April, 1967, killing about a dozen women and children, during the first UF regime. Fortunately for the CPM and unfortunately for those killed the Gandhian Chief Minister then held the Home portfolio and not the Marxist Jyoti Basu. Nothing was however said about what preceded and followed this unfortunate firing. But the fact remains that it was mainly the opposition of the CPM both within and outside the UF that led to protracted vacillation on the part of the Government led by it which thereby helped to consolidate what subsequently came to be known as Naxalite movement. It was also when Jyoti Basu became Home

Minister that Mr Kanu Sanyal and his associates were released unconditionally despite strong opposition from an influential section of the Front which now professes sympathy for the Naxalites.

In fact it was the rigid stand of the CPM on the Naxalbari issue among others that ultimately paved the way for the unsuccessful coup bid for toppling the UF Government on October, 1967 of its Chief Minister whose suspicions were roused when some of his colleagues painted a lurid picture of the law and order situation, the conflict between capital and labour and the implications of the Naxalbari line. Public memory being proverbially short it may be worthwhile to point out in this context that on his letter of resignation of his Ministry which was meant to be delivered to Governor Dharma Vira on the fateful day of October 21, 1967, Shri Ajoy Mukherjee made no secret of his animosity to the Marxists and made scathing condemnation of their activities—the impact was so great that its echo reverberated in the State Assembly even two years later—which had its origin in the close affinity between the CPM and the Naxalites in those hectic days.

History does not always repeat itself, this perhaps explains why yesterday's hawks have become today's doves and vice versa in their attitude but that is another story having little to do with what happened at Naxalbari in 1967.

SOMNATH BHATTACHARYYA
Santragachi, Howrah

Sagina Mahato

Mr Tapan Sinha's latest film *Sagina Mahato* should be scrutinised from the ideological point of view which is missed by your reviewer. Mr Sinha has tried to preach that it is the politicians who corrupt the working class, bring them misfortune and subject them to suffering and frustration. The inevitable conclusion that follows is that the working class should shun the professional politicians who are at the root of all

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the evils. Obviously the object of this crusade against political movements is to turn the people apolitical. Precisely, this is the object of the foreign imperialists and the ruling classes of this country. With the same object in view Mr Sinha has made a number of films such as *Galpa Holeo Satyi*, *Hatey Bazarey* etc.

Mr Sinha's endeavour should not be judged as an isolated phenomenon. It is connected with the pornography produced by the paid agents of the agencies in order to demoralise the youth of the country. Demoralisation and depoliticisation are necessary to crush the revolutionary movement from inside. So, it is the sacred task of all honest intellectuals to condemn and denounce the film *Sagina Mahato* which has been made to order of the foreign imperialists.

HITENDRA MITRA

Calcutta

Forest Land

Mr Upadhyaya in his letter (August 29) on forest land puts himself in a contradiction. The area where the refugees have constructed temporary huts, he says, is recorded as forest land by the Forest Department. No department of the government can run arbitrarily. Its records must tally with those of other departments concerned. There may be no sign of trees in the area referred to by Mr Upadhyaya, but there are other criteria besides trees which are taken into account in the definition of forest land. Many people during the regime of the United Front occupied these areas.

The reason why some areas remain unutilised, causing loss is that it is not possible to afforest all the marked out land together, the budget allocations being one of the factors to be considered.

P. K. CHOWDHURY
Mathabhanga, Cooch Behar

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