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## LEAKY CEILINGS

THE Congress Working Committee has once again deferred a decision on what should be the ceiling on land holdings. In May, the mini-AICC could not make its formulations on the question, because the sub-committee, appointed by the party, had been unable to submit its recommendations in time. The sub-committee's lapse was involuntary; what could it do if Mr Kumaramangalam, who is now said to be the Prime Minister's closest confidant, got delayed by a street accident? The postponement in May was forced on the party by an accident; the latest is deliberate. Being a democratic party the Congress is loath to take a decision without consulting the State Ministers whose opinions on the sub-committee's recommendations are being sought. Apparently, the Chief Ministers on the Working Committee are not considered competent to speak for that ilk. The party leadership has assured that the postponement is brief and a decision on land ceiling will have been taken before the month is out. Kulaks, beware!

The sub-committee has already introduced enough loopholes in its scheme for the kulaks to escape. The lowest ceiling of 10 acres will apply only to land yielding at least two crops a year and benefiting from government irrigation projects; not to all land of this category, though; the ceiling may be raised up to 18 acres, taking into consideration the fertility of the land and other factors. In practice, the matter will be decided on the basis of quite a different consideration. Those who will grease the palm of the local bosses of the Congress and the Government will be exempt from the 10-acre ceiling. The proposal for a ceiling of 10 acres is a plain hoax. The ceiling for land with assured irrigation for one crop a year has been proposed at 27 acres and for land of all other types at 54 acres. The Chief Ministers present at the Working Committee meeting were not satisfied even with these visibly perforated ceilings. One of them said if the ceiling for desert land is fixed at 54 acres, there can be no justification for a lower ceiling in hilly terrains. Another argued that to enable his State to catch up with others in the matter of irrigation some special consideration should be shown to land-owners in the State who make their own irrigation arrangements.

Now that the Chief Ministers who do not make the Working-Committee grade have got a chance to plead their special difficulties, more objections

to the sub-committee's recommendations will pour in, and democratic considerations may compel the party leaders to appoint another sub-committee to screen them and evolve a consensus. This may delay land reforms, but none need worry, for what will emerge out of this exercise will safeguard the interests of all—land-owners, chief ministers, Congress and other like-minded parties, and, of course, landless labour. Maybe when the ceilings are ultimately fixed and enforced, all land-owners in the country will become 'Bhudanis' and voluntarily part with their surplus land as the ceilings have taken care to protect their interests. They have already become so disgusted with the mundane that divorce has become rampant in their class and families are fast breaking up. That all these will enable each member of the broken-up families to retain estates up to the

permissible ceilings is but a fringe benefit which should not make their piety suspect. The Government does not question the motive of such voluntary "banaprastha", and it proposes to regularise the incidental benefits by enforcing the proposed law some 16 months later than what had been earlier proposed. Lest the landless should get impatient the Working Committee has promised every homeless person in the rural areas a piece of homestead land by August 15 next year, whatever the cost, the estimate of which in less than two months has risen from Rs 100 crores to Rs 300 crores. With the promise of a piece of land to till and a home of one's own the landless and the homeless can have no complaint against the Government. They have waited for this humble millennium for ages, and they should not grudge a few more years' delay.

Karunanidhi, by no means a man of mercy contrary to his name, by resorting to blatant anti-government gestures and the two could not possibly meet without losing face. Hence all the trouble. But the CPI sees in Karunanidhi an arch reactionary who is out to fleece the peasants, alias the Coimbatore landlords. Not that Mr Karunanidhi represents what the communists call a progressive but at least in the matter of tariff increase he does not seem to be at fault. If the CPI tries to rationalise its action in Tamil Nadu by taking a stance that any measure is good enough to topple a non-Congress Government, it should get all the blessings of the Tamil Nadu kulaks. It is amazing what the CPI can make of Marx! In theory it rends the sky with the demand to tax the agricultural rich; in practice, it reboils at the proposal—and all this for the benefit of the Congress which can shake the CPI off its back any time it chooses.

## CPI In Tamil Nadu

Congressmen in West Bengal will not allow any peasant movement in the State; all the demands and grievances of the peasants will be met through enactment of law. Congressmen in Tamil Nadu will not rest until peasant movements engulf the entire State; they have organised a bullock-cart blockade of Coimbatore, a sort of State-wide hartal, a mourning day and will organise this Sunday 'public meetings' all over the State. They do not believe that mere laws can meet the demands of the peasants or the peasants associated with the Action Committee of the State agriculturists, stated to be 600,000 strong.

The Central Government, a Congress one, has directed Congressmen in the States to levy taxes and duties in the rural sector to increase their resources. But the Tamil Nadu Congressmen will fight tooth and nail the DMK Government which increased the power tariff by 1.2 paise per each irrigation pump-set. Fifteen people died on July 5 as a result of the agitation.

These conflicting stances among Congressmen are probably manifestations of what they call unity among diversity; others call it brass opportunism.

While one and all have considered the Congress agitation in Tamil Nadu as something phoney, the CPI, like the romantics who see in a drop of water the whole world, has discovered in it the operation of dialectics. Congressmen are much too aware that the tariff rates on electric pump-sets in Tamil Nadu are ridiculously low; even in Orissa, the land of low levies, the rate is 24 paise; in Tamil Nadu, it is now proposed to be raised from 10.8 to 12 paise. And in Coimbatore, the landlords are pretty well off, and it is there that most of the electric pump-sets are operating. That is why even the Congressmen are not precisely saying that they are against the tariff increase. All they say is that Mr Karunanidhi must sit at a conference with the Action Committee. But the Action Committee has sufficiently antagonised Mr

## The Rupee In Trouble

*A correspondent writes:*

New Delhi's handling of the present international monetary crisis continues to be as amateurish as ever. Three weeks after the pound sterling was floated, the Government is still not sure about what to do with the rupee. The initial reaction was one of utter confusion and it was only after a week from the date the crisis had broken out that the Reserve Bank of India took a decision on the revised spot and forward rates of the rupee vis-a-vis the pound. This naturally dislocated foreign trade, particularly exports, which for all practical purposes has remained under suspended animation during the past few weeks. Even now the outlines of the official policy remain as vague as at the beginning of the current crisis. The sterling-rupee link has been maintained though it remains largely inexplicable why New Delhi must treat severance of the tie as a sort of minor sacrilege.

But even the linkage does not seem to have been taken too seriously—and that would at least have given the policy a look of consistency. Thus while the pound floats downward—at the weekend it was nearly 8% below the official rate—the Reserve Bank has thought it wise to marginally raise the rupee spot and forward rates, thus virtually revaluing the Indian currency to some extent. There is nothing wrong in this, if only the principle and the rationale on which this was done were fully explained. But since no such clarification has been made public, it only appears as an effort to combine floating with fixed parity which, to say the least, cannot be sustained. If the banks are finding the guidelines too complicated to follow, that should be understandable.

What is most disconcerting is that such monetary crises are likely to become the rule rather than the exception. For all the tributes paid to the Smithsonian Agreement, the capitalist system has proved to be chronically prone to such periodic disturbances. If this is so, it is equally true that the interest of the developing countries will go by default as the rich nations keep the prerogative of sorting out these problems exclusively to themselves. That has been one clear indication of the Santiago UNCTAD. And if the Group of Ten had made a move to allow some of the developing countries to be associated with it, that should be read mainly as a mere gesture. It is thus high time that the developing economies, particularly of contiguous regions, decided to set up an agency for framing their own monetary policies when such crises break out. The consternation caused among some of the South Asian countries in the wake of floating of the pound underlines the importance of such an organisation, in the constitution of which India, among others, can take the initiative. At the same time, New Delhi must reconsider the advisability of linking the rupee to any

of those so-called intervention currencies, which seem to be growing weaker as some of the other currencies like the mark and the yen are getting stronger and steadier. The entire question of the rupee's parities with other currencies needs to be reviewed to explore if there is scope for working out independent distinct parities. It also needs to be clearly decided that a devaluation of an intervention currency should not automatically lead to a change in the rupee's value also. The effect of marginal devaluation of a major currency can be absorbed by changes in export subsidies and import duties, at least for the short term. In West Germany, for instance, exporters have insurance coverage up to 3% fluctuation in parity rates. Indeed, during the past few years, the rupee has been tossed in so many directions so often by extraneous developments that the country must now think of firming up the value of its currency and give it a little more respectability by way of selective revaluation and the like. And the time to make a beginning is now.

## Korea

Reunification of divided Korea, peacefully or otherwise, will be welcome. But those who scan the present seven-point agreement for a magic formula to cure all past bitterness should pause a while to think. The stains of blood in that haunted land are still there and the super-powers are still hanging around. The agreement surprised many, including the generally well-informed Pentagon, and showed the world that Kissinger-type parleys are not the monopoly of the big brothers. Late in the summer of 1971, the Red Cross of the two halves initiated talks in Panmunjom village to find out and re-unite the separated families. Now it appears that behind this show the two sides were exchanging emissaries to negotiate larger and more delicate issues.

The report shows that Pyongyang and Seoul agreed on quite a few things. More important, however, is their agreement to stop armed provocation and the slanging match that have marked their relations during the past two decades. They have also vowed to promote mutual understanding and set up a co-ordinating committee to look after things of mutual interest. All these are to be prelude to a unity move which is to honour peace and is to be free from foreign influence and ideological inhibitions. Other tidbits like social, cultural and athletic co-operation and the usual rhetoric for a golden future are there.

Though the agreement has warmed Korean hearts and been greeted by all, the road to unification is not as easy as the words sound. For twenty years after the bloody war, the narrow strip dividing the two halves has remained militarily the most heavily concentrated area in the world, with about half a million soldiers facing each other. Even a month ago the South Korean President saw the spectre of a communist offensive and declared an emergency in the country. On the unification question itself the North and South differ materially. The former wants a confederation with a supervisory council and the latter a UN-guided election. Though Kim Il Sung has recently relented on the troop reduction issue, including civil defence, he cannot give up his basic strivings. The South Korean President too will not surrender his interest and allow a communist take-over hands down. Already the pressure against any settlement is on within his own power elite and he had to denounce "northern hypocrisy" to allay their fear.

Even then the agreement will bring about important changes in the South-East Asian political scene. The big powers cannot ignore it and the regional forces cannot but be influenced by it. As for Kim Il Sung, the agreement will further his claim as an independent leader beyond the influence of Moscow and Peking.

The Kremlin will surely hail the agreement as it will neutralise a possible source of conflict so near the Russian border. Nixon has viewed it as a by-product of his efforts to ease big-power tension. In the early fifties his predecessors had fought the communists here. Now he has taken

up the same task in Vietnam with a rare show of tenacity and savagery. Anything will gladden him at this time that lessens his burden elsewhere and enables him to carry on his task of finishing off the Vietcong.

Pakistan as a close ally of China could play an important role in a Sino-Indian dialogue.

Mr D. P. Dhar is to be formally inducted into the Cabinet which would end his special status as a super minister now and an official then. Mr G. Parthasarathy who played an important role at Simla is being mentioned for the China operation to effect a breakthrough by the end of the year. Around September-October Mrs Gandhi is expected to make a dramatic gesture to Mr Chou En-lai, possibly by offering to hold talks without preconditions.

The multiplicity of standards Indian public opinion has been used to is the direct result of the Government leadership's double standards. At the Simla talks India wanted to convert the ceasefire line in Kashmir into an international border (an old Soviet formula this) which means formalising the partition of Kashmir on the basis of the de facto realities, while before 1962 India would not so much as hold talks with China until "aggression" was vacated. But now, can there be a satisfactory solution to the Kashmir issue without a settlement with China on the Aksai Chin area? Even the Government leadership seems to have thought about it rather late while among the public there is no thinking of this aspect of the problem at all. In 1948 China was not a party to the Kashmir dispute. Now it very much is. Kashmir has all the ramifications of a trilateral dispute.

Much depends on how the Simla agreement works out in practice. Renunciation of use of force and an assurance on keeping third party mediation out is interpreted by the Indian side to mean that the Simla agreement is more than a no-war pact. In which case, why did India propose a no-war pact in the first place? All the platitudes and slogans in the agreement are found elsewhere too—in the Tashkent agreement, in the UN Charter. And the Panch Sil has been incorporated almost word for word in the agree-

### *View from Delhi*

## For A Dialogue With China

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

THE Simla summit inched back from near-breakdown to a breakthrough on July 3 because India gave up its pointless insistence on a package deal as the basis for durable peace and Pakistan agreed to renounce use of force and not to seek third party intervention to solve bilateral issues. The phrase "step by step" finds clear mention in the agreement which means Pakistan in principle gained more than India did. The CPI might welcome the Simla accord but a section of the Left Establishment has mounted a campaign against Mr Bhutto and finds itself in the distinguished company of the Jana Sangh which is attacking the agreement. Could it be that the public Soviet posture welcoming the agreement notwithstanding, there is uneasiness at the thought that India might not depend on the Soviet veto on the Kashmir issue any more?

India seems to think that the Simla agreement could be the model for other tension areas in Asia. In other words, the Simla approach should have some applicability to the Sino-Indian border dispute. India's self-righteousness about its "no third party mediation" insistence sounds a little bizarre in the context of the Indo-Soviet treaty which links a superpower with an Asian power claiming to be non-aligned. Nevertheless, India could well afford to initiate a dialogue with China. When the

Indo-Soviet treaty was signed, one was given to understand that it need not stand in the way of India discussing its border dispute with China. But then, what has been behind the reluctance to attempt normalisation of relations with Peking?

India's contention in the past has been that Kashmir has been a part of India and therefore beyond dispute. But Anglo-U.S. pressure under arms aid against China in 1962 forced India to have five rounds of talks in 1962-63 on Kashmir, thus accepting by implication that it is a territorial dispute. Later, in the Indian view, Pakistani occupation of parts of Kashmir was outright aggression whereas the same could not be said about Chinese occupation of parts of the Aksai Chin region because at one point or the other India had accepted that the border with China on this sector had not been clearly demarcated. Pakistan has been in continuous occupation of some 31,000 square miles while India claims that 14,500 square miles of the Aksai Chin area now in Chinese occupation belong to it (India).

Indications are that an Indian initiative to end the confrontation with China is in the offing. By September Pakistan would have recognised Bangladesh and China's recognition might follow. India would have a clear idea of China's attitude to Pakistan and Bangladesh. Commentators have already suggested that

ment. The agreement by itself is unexceptionable on the face of it but bristles with contradictions. While claiming to conform to the provisions of the UN Charter, it seeks to bar third party mediation including UN mediation. Under the Charter one of the parties to a dispute can take it to the UN and the concurrence of the other is not necessary. But the agreement would seem to circumscribe the UN rôle when it insists that any other method should be

adopted only by mutual agreement when bilateral attempts fail. The agreement has succeeded in freezing the Kashmir issue until the representatives of both countries meet before the next summit. But each side is technically maintaining its claim to the whole of Kashmir and if Pakistan does not agree to the partition plan, the issue would stay stuck where it was.

July 7, 1972

## Reflections On The Summit

R. P. MULLICK

**U**NDER the glare of international limelight the summit conference has concluded at Simla. But the power that had provided the inspiration for it will have to bide for some more opportune time when Bangladesh could be prevailed upon to softpedal the issue of war criminals. For a time it has not been possible to bring together India, Pakistan and Bangladesh into a workable arrangement under the benign direction of the USSR.

Sheikh Mujibur had a severe setback after his liberal-democratic surrender to the Pakistanis on the night of March 25, 1971. But then providence was merciful to him. He got a new lease of life. More, the political leadership of his people was served to him on a platter by a foreign army, without his going through the compulsions, the pain, the efforts and the sacrifices of a protracted armed struggle from within. The result has not broadened his international outlook, and since his attitude towards the people of West Pakistan (contra the Government) continues to be one of "quits-with-you", it is clear that his present policy will not succeed in bringing back the 40,000 and odd Bengali soldiers and some 400,000 Bengali civilians now in West Pakistan. Who would benefit from a perpetual unresponsiveness to President Bhutto?

After all Bangladesh needs trained efficient service personnel. Unfortunately, the Sheikh and his Government have chosen to nourish a bloated conception of national sentiment above statesmanship.

As for India, at Simla she projected, with success, a demonstrative, moralist, international attitude of peaceableness through disengagement of forces and also hedged away from closer political proximity with the USSR which is rather embarrassing for her "non-aligned" face. The shadow of the USA loomed and still looms, over the entire international perspective before the summit. The people of Pakistan, her present leaders specifically, had few expectations from the summit and fewer illusions. They have not lost anything, certainly not honour; on the contrary, they may gain international recognition of the problems and dilemmas of a defeated nation. Even the USSR henceforward will have to keep in consideration Pakistan's points of view, apropos India's.

Not unexpectedly, Nixon's personal representative arrived in India for talks with Mrs Indira Gandhi just after the summit. Few would believe that he came without any previous indication of purposeful response. The press hand-out that Mr Connally has deigned to give is therefore misleading. In this era of

sophisticated "people's capitalism" proliferating its cartels and foreign agencies in the mutually understood context of nation-to-nation intercourse, it is seldom necessary to express the obvious. On the contrary, it becomes essential sometimes to talk of all things except the crucial one. Why stress Indo-American cooperation, and a new era heralding it when pretending the very reverse is so advantageous in fooling the Indian people apropos India's got-up anti-imperialist posture?

It will be no wonder if in the post-summit situation, the USSR finds that the USA has stolen a fluky march over it in the art and interplay of power-politics in the South Asian region. Whose net gain would it be, except that of a neo-imperialist India, when the descent from the summit to dreary realism is completed?

### Tamil Nadu

## A Strange Assortment

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

**P**OLITICS in Tamil Nadu is being conducted by a vicious assortment of betrayers. The CPI rubbed shoulders with the kulak class in joining hands with the landowners' agitation which has spread like fire in Tamil Nadu. One wonders how it is possible for Mr K. T. K. Thangamani, a CPI leader from Madurai, to join with Mr N. S. Manradar, Congress (R), a kulak owning 1000 acres of land, in the agitation. The purpose of the agitation is ridiculous as landowners want a cut in the existing electricity charges for pump-sets. The rate of 12 paise per unit seems to be reasonable as compared to the rate prevailing in Kerala, where a puppet CPI Chief Minister is ruling with the blessings of the Congress (R). Nearly 2,000 kulaks and their agents were arrested by the DMK police; but it is interesting to read the list of arrested persons, mostly big land-

owners having different political colours—Congress (R), CPI, Swatantra, SSP etc who are bent on toppling the DMK Ministry. The CPI branch in Tamil Nadu believes in establishing a Congress (R) Government so that it can bring communism.

The DMK, of course, is more efficient in the job of betrayal than the Congress (R). The DMK has got two legs, one to kick the Congress (R), with another to kick the communists, whether right, left or ultra. Mr Karunanidhi occupies the throne of the great Vikramaditya and Mr Mohan Kumaramangalam and Mr C. Subramaniam are playing the roles of King Bhoja and Needhi Deva to secure the Throne.

Another formidable feature in the power struggle is the role of the CPM. After getting their noses cut in West Bengal, the branch of the CPM in Tamil Nadu begs for medicine from the DMK. Smiling with the DMK, the CPM leaders raised the slogan for state autonomy. The DMK returned their smiles by cutting the hands of one innocent CPM cadre, Mr C. K. Madhavan who was in police custody in connection with the murder of Mr Pratap Chandran, a key man of the DMK responsible for the trouble in the Simpson plant. The CPM's refusal to take part in the landowners' agitation may bring the leaders of the CPM and DMK nearer. But this will not prevent the DMK from butchering the innocent cadre of CITU, the CPM-dominated trade union organisation, CITU has now stopped its support Mr Kuchelar. According to the latest report, the DMK Government is planning to kill Mr Kuchelar for his honesty and loyalty towards his workers. Mr Kuchelar has now gone underground. Mr Shenai, the Commissioner of Police, has announced that Mr Kuchelar is wanted by the police in connection with the murder of Mr Pratap Chandran. It looks funny how the police can arrest a prominent trade union leader of this country for the murder of an employee of Simpson for which he is not responsible. Why should the same logic not be applied to all trade union lead-

ers? According to rumours spread by the DMK press, Mr Kuchelar has run away to Srikakulam. He may be roaming as a sannyasi in some North Indian State. The dream of all puppet unions—INTUC, AITUC, HMS and DMK have now been fulfilled. They betrayed lakhs of workers in Madras who stood unitedly under the only loyal trade union leader

who never accepted a bribe from the management and who never travelled by plane on subscription money collected from the innocent workers. Kuchelar may die. But Kuchelarism will survive in Madras factories because he told the workers that they should own the factories, that getting a higher wage or bonus is a temporary phenomenon.

## Kerala

# The CM Decamps

RAMJI

**T**HE Chief Minister of Kerala, the inimitable CPI leader, Mr Achutha Menon, has lamented the climate of irresponsibility that has enveloped his State, at all levels: industrial, political, educational etc. He spoke and boarded the plane on a month-long Odyssey to the GDR. He set a prime example of responsibility. While his State was burning, the most responsible way he could respond to it as the Chief Minister was to undertake a long study tour. This is an angle of progressivism which even Lenin could not have evolved.

The Chief Minister has passed the baby on to the Congress colleagues in his Cabinet. And what a baby! Hydra-headed, to put it mildly. The administration has never had to face so many highly acute problems at the same time and that too with an empty Treasury. But the Chief Minister had to go to the GDR for a month. At first the idea behind this trip was for "rest and treatment" to a Chief Minister who has made a political art of his physical ailments. But when he reached Berlin the truth came out. The ageing Mr Menon was about to commence a study tour of the GDR. One is never too old to learn, obviously. And the multi-thousand students in private colleges could very well afford to go without academic studies.

He has left behind a legacy of trouble for the benefit of the Congress Ministers among whom he had distributed his portfolios. When he left the State on June 23 the entire university education in Kerala was in a highly uncertain state and the background features of it were highly explosive. The strike in the major public sector unit, FACT, involving 4,500 workers and the workers of dozens of other units which had to lay off as this mother unit was not functioning for the 36th day, on the 23rd, had paralysed the entire economy of the State. More than 100,000 cashew factory workers were on strike. Over 200,000 plantation workers had threatened to go on strike from July 12. The workers of the Government-owned plantations were already on strike. Yet Mr Menon had to visit the GDR. Maybe he wanted the Congress to face the music and be thoroughly discredited.

The colleges under private managements which should have opened on June 19 remain closed at the time of writing and the Church and the Nair Service Society who between them run 65 private colleges have categorically refused to open their colleges unless the Government comes down to their own terms. The Government has been laying down mandates about opening dates and postponing these regularly. At the

time of writing the opening date is July 10. The Church and the NSS have declared that they will not open colleges on that day. They have built up a volunteer force of over 30,000 to defend their colleges. Pastoral letters have been issued by the Church to the faithful to rally round for the defence of their colleges.

This is a curious sequel to a move which began last year to curb corruption in private colleges in the matter of appointments and admission of students. Last year the teachers of private colleges had risen in revolt against the corrupt practices of managements and the strike was total. The Government literally bought up its leader by offering him the post of Chairman of the Rubber Board. The leader obligingly doublecrossed the following. The Government took away the support of the students by promising to meet their demand for unification of the enhanced fees in private colleges with those in the government colleges. The strike fizzled out. This happened last year. The Government did nothing to carry out the assurance for fee unification. And the fundamental question of amendment to Clause 30 (1) of the Constitution to curb minority licence

in the running of private educational institutions was sought to be discussed. Over this there was a split among the ruling parties. The question was shelved and the Government came out with an order for fee unification just a few days before the colleges were due to open. Just how unification of fees would stop corruption in private colleges is beyond rational comprehension. Anyway this is the cry raised by the Youth Congress and the Congress-led Kerala Students Union. These radical spearheads of the Congress have to be kept bright and sharp and hence the order of fee unification and the consequent mess into which college education has plunged.

Very cleverly the CPI and the other alliance partners have gone into the background and left the Congress alone to face the determined opposition by the Church and the Nair Service Society who have a long tradition of toppling administrations and who were responsible for the notorious liberation movement in 1959, on a similar issue of an Education Bill, which led to the fall of the first ever communist ministry in Kerala. These two forces representing powerful vested interests say they will not open colleges unless and until the Government is

prepared to compensate them for the loss in revenue entailed by fee reduction. Though the Pradesh Congress Secretary, Mr A. K. Antony, is breathing fire and brimstone against managements and is talking about taking over the colleges with the help of students and teachers, the private managements are going to win hands down. And in the process the Congress is going to lose the support of its traditional backers, the Church and the NSS. And the student wing of the Congress is going to be disgruntled and there might be an exodus from it to other student organisations. The cheap trick of mouthing empty radicalism has landed the Congress in this muddle. After all, fee unification was never on the list of priorities when the burning problems of poverty, unemployment etc. remain to be tackled. And fee unification will benefit only the affluent section of the society which sends its children to colleges. To it the fee is immaterial, and coaching is more important and it is a fact that private colleges generally give better coaching. Anyway the vast number of students aspiring for college education have their future effectively bottled up by the irrelevant heroics of the radicalised Congress.

## Roots Of Xenophobia In Assam

HIREN GOHAIN

I have purposely avoided the word 'chauvinism', for hostility to the 'outsiders' in Assam, periodically breaking out into violence, stems from fear and resentment rather than from a sense of national superiority. People in Assam are afraid, and deeply anxious. The Congress leadership is unable to answer their anxious questions about the future. The other political parties are not yet a force. Lack of political guidance inevitably leads such social feelings of fear and frustration to blind and often brutal expression.

I remember a public meeting at Gauhati where a young student work-

ed himself up into a fury and demanded that all railway and air connections between Assam and the rest of India be at once severed. Much later, talking to a Plains Tribal Council worker, with a barely controlled anger against the Assamese, I came across a paradoxical parallel. The PTC chap said bitterly that he was fed up with 'progress', and wanted no more of it. For what was 'progress'? It meant the growth of towns, which in its turn meant the loss of ancestral land to the tribals, and, since land was their source of livelihood, their eventual ruin. It is significant that

while the average Assamese deplored this 'unreasonable' and 'reactionary' attitude of the organized Plains tribes, he unconsciously adopted the same attitude vis-a-vis the rest of India. Things were bad enough for people of this region before independence. But now they are felt as unbearable.

Is there any justification for this feeling? Unfortunately yes, there is. Progress has meant to the bulk of the population pauperization. According to statistics released recently by the State Agricultural Research Centre at Jorhat, in 1950 about 33 per cent of the peasants in Assam

were either landless or owners of uneconomic holdings. Their proportion has now swelled to 77 per cent. When I visited certain areas of North Kamrup last year during a severe drought, I saw peasants reduced to utter desperation by the failure of a single crop: they sold whatever little gold they had clung to for years, then their few household utensils, their cattle and finally portions of land. There were no facilities for cheap irrigation or water control. Credit was either unavailable or available at rates (like 100 per cent or 150 per cent interest or more) that meant inevitable ruin. Most of the small peasants were in the grip of a system that allowed grain merchants to purchase the entire harvest of fields at rates decided by themselves.

The market to the peasant is of course a 'law of nature'. He blames fate or his own improvidence when he finds his small plots passing into the hands of the local *mahajan* (moneylender). He denounces the government in heart-warming language, but alas! he still carries within him relics of a feudal notion of paternal government. If only we had good men up at Shillong! But he also looks around, and sees colonies of peasants who had emigrated within recent memory from Eastern Bengal or Nepal. He forgets that these people had reclaimed their land from malarial, marshy, snake-infested wastes or from luxuriant tropical jungles. His own lack and want press upon him, with children crying at home for food. And when 'educated' people tell him that these outsiders are 'vultures' who had robbed him of his land, and it is for them that poverty stalks the land, he is all too ready to listen.

We need not be so swept off our feet by the formula of proletarian internationalism as to forget that the peasant with his deep attachment to the soil tends to resent encroachments from outside. He is tolerant, even kind, in his relation to the individual 'outsider'. But he is angry when the children of such outsiders,

even more wretchedly poor than he or his kin, gather edible roots and herbs from the village common for selling in the town market, thus depriving him of a support during the lean season. Without much experience of class-oriented struggle, he watches with smouldering fire in his eyes, when a Bihari businessman who had won a bid, forbids him to fish in the local bil (small lake) that supplied his village with fish from time immemorial, and himself proceeds to clean up the entire stock of fish with dynamite and mechanically operated boats.

#### Stunted Nationalism

Assam, like most other States of India, is the seat of a stunted nationalism. The policy of the Central Government has so far been to patronize the cultural aspects of this nationalism while ruthlessly hacking away at its economic programme. The middle-class intellectual in Assam has been led by this nationalism, which he imbibes as glorious heritage of the past, to expect a flourishing state for his people and culture, and he is puzzled to find that prosperity eludes them. The young businessman finds that he has extremely powerful competitors from outside who hold his business to ransom. He can scarcely match their capital, their organization, their subtle and devious links with government and transport authorities. While he cannot dream of a market outside the state, he feels that the local demand is also far from strong and steady. The bigger army contracts and industrial permits are bagged by more resourceful outsiders (who include people with local offices as well as wire-pullers from the houses of Big Business).

There is yet another means of earning one's livelihood: service. This has been the dream of the 'normal' Assamese youth for decades. And now the affluence of the top echelons of government officers, engineers, big doctors and the few lucky contractors has made it irresistible. Tall and gleaming R.C.C.

buildings are going up everywhere at Gauhati with barbaric indifference to civic regulations and needs of sanitation. Big cars flit past one in the street honking their owners' brass status. And ninety per cent of these buildings are built and owned by people with income that would not have allowed them to such luxuries but for the reckless and large-scale defalcation from government funds, the widespread use of heavy bribes and 'speed-money'. And yet these avenues are crowded, impassable now. The poor peasant, the struggling clerk, the declining absentee landlord, all want their sons in government service. Hence the craze for higher education, which the wary government is doing everything within its power to stifle. The figures for educated unemployment are among the highest in India. Unofficially, in the plains, in a population of about 8 million, about 800,000 may be counted unemployed.

If we omit the hills, which have now been allowed to form separate States, pressure on land in Assam is among the highest in India, each acre of land supporting more persons than it does in Uttar Pradesh or Maharashtra. We have seen how poorly the government has equipped the peasant with the benefits of irrigation, fertilizer, pesticides and water-control measures. (This year, it is not drought but heavy floods that destroyed standing crops over large areas. Floods every year cause a general damage and loss to the State to the tune of Rs 10 crores). No wonder that the villager's son leaves it to the loafing city-bred intellectual to weave pastoral dreams about the country-life and himself makes a bee-line to the town at the earliest opportunity. But in the town disappointment awaits him. His education is useless. Jobs are scarce, whether in government offices or in the few small private firms. Indeed in a recent 'economy' drive, the government has proposed large-scale retrenchment that has deepened frustration and resentment.

Ah, but what about industry?

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The tea-gardens are introducing labour-saving devices of all kinds, and during the last ten years, nearly 400,000 employees have been sacked, and there has been no increase in employment. Besides, Marwari firms owning a large number of gardens have taken to employing people from outside who are prepared to work for a scale of pay that the local Assamese consider unfair, accustomed as they are to the scale maintained by the European gardens in the recent past. It is also useful to remember that the large profits reaped by the tea-gardens are rarely ploughed back into investments in local development. Close to Rs 200 crores are said to be sent outside the State by the gardens from their annual income. The imperialist exploitation has thus continued under different masters. This incidentally explodes the 'theory' fashionable among certain sections of bourgeois economists, stating that an 'advanced enclave' in a backward economy can help economic development; witness Union Miniere de Haut Katanga etc. But the point is that such advanced enclaves are exploitative in intention and operation, and are hardly concerned with economic development.

What about government investment? Well, the fledgling industry department was fleeced mercilessly in the sixties by Marwari wizards who took permits and licences only to sell them, took loans only to disappear without a trace. The Assam Electricity Board has run up an impressive loss of Rs 42 crores, primarily because of corruption. The refinery is small, and its employment capacity has come as a rude shock to millions who had taken part in meetings and processions demanding its establishment. The Paper Mill at Jogighopa had begun by purchasing old, and some say obsolete, machinery, and such was the public outcry that the management has since taken refuge behind virtual inaction. The State Government's finances are in a terrible mess. But an even more cruel blow was the

Reserve Bank's decision not to honour overdrafts. The result is that all development schemes and projects have been shelved and the cumulative backlog of backwardness will obviously increase further. When Mrs Gandhi visited Assam before the election, she wore the indigenous *riha* and *mekhela* for public appearances, and promised special assistance to backward regions, to the sentimental jubilation of certain indigenous fools. Now we hear that in Maharashtra they are unable to tax the bloated co-operative farming magnates, but are stopping overdrafts of a terribly poor, hard-pressed, backward State, which is literally being bled white. The State Government has reason to plead that it is being deprived of vital fiscal resources by the Centre's grip on oil royalties and excise on tea, and by other States's claim to the larger share of taxes accruing. In a recent memorandum presented to the Planning Minister, Mr Mohan Dharia, the State Government laments that during the period 1951-1968 the Central Government invested only a meagre 1.6 per cent (One-tenth of that invested in West Bengal, one-tenth of that in Orissa) of the total investments in Assam. These figures speak for themselves.

#### Against Outsiders

The peasants of Assam are desperate, the educated youth are frustrated and furious. It is all very well to preach to them the benefits of socialism. But others are also ready with more catchy slogans. Besides, such slogans seem to them closer to the reality of their experience than the appeal for tolerance and proletarian brotherhood. (I think I have some sort of a right to speak bluntly, as on two occasions I had faced the prospect of unsolicited martyrdom simply for the reason that I pleaded that Bengalis should not be made scapegoats). Since the prevailing system is capitalism, and mass struggle against it has not yet begun in the State, the common people tend to see it as a

straight fight between outsiders and sons of the soil for land, for jobs, for contracts. The parties on the left are bewildered. The CPI is trying opportunist tacks and manoeuvres. The CPI(M) is listened to where it has bases, which are precious few. The ruling class has a free field for its dirtiest machinations.

The majority of the townsmen have a bit of land in the countryside, and they are understandably very lukewarm in their response to land-reform. They would rather that the land-hungry Assamese peasant attacked and evicted the immigrants of other nationalities. The rallying-point is therefore never the land, though the moment a riot threatens to erupt, the poor Assamese peasant hopes to grab the ploughfields of the immigrants in a patriotic bonanza. The rallying cries usually are 'language in danger!' and 'save Motherland from Outsiders'. Sections of the Assamese bourgeoisie antagonised by the inroads of monopoly capital, politicians crushed by Mrs Gandhi's Machine, and intellectual and professional Satraps desirous of increasing both power and popularity lead the band. The government's attitude is cold and calculating in the extreme: they watch with inscrutable reserve, flying straws in the wind. This time, when a section of students demonstrated in favour of making Assamese the sole medium of instruction with English as a stand by, the Youth Congress supported it, while the veterans said nothing. The leading Assamese weekly, with a fairly strong following among students, welcomed the 'revolutionary' zeal of the students, and

ষ্টলে খোঁজ নিন

সন্ধিক্ষণ

রাজনীতি-অর্থনীতি-সামাজিক বিষয়ক  
পাক্ষিক পত্রিকা

পরের সংখ্যা ২২শে জুলাই বেরোবে।

warned the Bengalis of Cachar in grave, grim accents. (This weekly, though sometimes critical of the government, made frantic campaigns on behalf of the Ruling Congress on the eve of the election). Two other dailies, close to the government, published inflammatory letters threatening all and sundry with dire consequences if Assamese was not made the sole medium of instruction at the university. (If the P.U. course is absorbed in the school curriculum, and there are plans afoot, then Assamese will have to be made the sole medium at schools also! Is this the thin end of the wedge?) As a final tribute to democracy these papers blacked out all dissent, and suppressed all letters and statements questioning the wisdom of the decision. When the Academic Council, under the watchful eye of student-agitators, and in the absence of the Bengali members, reversed their earlier decision to concede to the Bengalis the right to answer in their own language, there was jubilation among that section of the students and the papers. Editorial comments conferred the accolade on them, and the Radio feted them. In the celebrations, it was not noticed that a wellknown student leader, who had accompanied the present author to the university and tried to reason with the students, was brutally assaulted and beaten up by a student goonda. The news was carefully and deliberately blacked out.

There is not a shadow of doubt that these Fascist manifestations were encouraged and protected by the authorities. The intellectual satraps and the perfumed businessmen of course dislike violence, but they leave it to the dear students to enforce such patriotic decisions. Not that their children have any knowledge of local culture or language. The fashion now is to send them to English-medium schools, and to cultivate the bastard culture of broken English, Bombay films and pop-songs. As for the youth, they have come through the mill of poorly staffed, badly equipped schools and colleges,

miles away from a library. The political parties on the left are always using them as a kind of cavalry in demonstrations and processions, hardly caring to give them a real political education. The bravest of such lovers of Assam cannot spell most Assamese words correctly, do not read Assamese books or magazines, and know woefully little about the cultural heritage of Assam. But the smouldering resentment of deprived people burst into flame in them, and politicians from the ruling class deftly use them for arson against the poor of other communities.

But what makes language so explosive a question? And why does resentment at under-development erupt into communal violence? Every Assamese boy learns at school that the Bengalis in the first half of the nineteenth century 'persuaded' the British rulers to impose Bengali as the official language and vernacular in Assam. (Even today the Bengali in Assam feels nervous and sheepish about the crime perpetrated by his forefathers more than a century ago). He does not learn that the first modern schools were started and staffed by Bengali teachers. He is not told that modern Assamese literature was greatly stimulated and nourished by Bengali influence. And even the educated Assamese adult is unaware that after all at that time the power of decision rested not with the Bengali 'persuaders', but with the cold and shrewd British rulers, who thought nothing of partitioning Bengal in 1905 on administrative grounds. Actually, as Bengal Provincial Consultations of that period make it clear, the British were led to take that decision in 1831 by their impatience with the Assamese feudal aristocrats whom they employed at first, and who were scarcely trained to discharge the duties of the imperialist government with its mysteries of files, memos and notes. Again, it was not Assamese but Persian that Bengali replaced as official language! Later, however, as a crop of educated Assamese came up, tension between Assamese and

Bengali educated groups developed, and the British rulers did all in their power to convince the Assamese leaders that the mistake had been made under pressure from Bengalis, and that they wanted rather to have Assamese. The Bengalis at that time also behaved as though government jobs were their patrimony, not to speak of the constant and disastrous flaunting of their cultural 'superiority'. (The Assamese were to commit the same mistake later with regard to the Hills and Plains tribes). This legacy of bourgeois greed, jealousy and snobbery has been sedulously kept alive during the last hundred years. This has inspired Assamese mobs to spread loot and arson over defenceless settlements and this has inspired the bourgeois press in Calcutta to invent demented details of Assamese barbarity. If the Assamese now want to impose their 'rule' on others, it is chastening to remember that before the Second World War a 'leader' of the Bengali community in a public meeting at Tezpur invited the British government to patronize the intelligent and enterprising Bengalis and ignore the "weak and effeminate" Assamese! The record is disgraceful. It is not enough for the Progressives on either side to wrest the constitutional rights for the minorities in the State. The Bengalis and the Assamese must begin to learn to live as neighbours, respecting each other, and also sharing each other's life. Here the Bengalis have a long way to go. Nostalgia for a dominant role in the past makes them insensitive to the demands of the present. Let them have as the medium the language they want. But let them also take some genuine interest in the culture of the region where they have lived so long. As for the people of Assam, only real political education, with a dynamic communist vanguard, can wean them away from such negative and disastrous perspectives, and such desperate methods. Hunger and unemployment are the real dangers, not a conspiracy of outsiders taken

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in the lump. Let them fight the exploiters by all means, and then they will have allies among the Bengalis. Or they will be instruments in the hands of fascist manipulators, and securely entrenched exploiters, thriving on dissensions among the poor subject population.

One more point in the end. Since under-development makes land the major source of livelihood for an overwhelming majority of the population, further pressure on land must be prevented. Otherwise in this under-developed society, bloody internecine feuds will be endemic. Assam has had within the last hundred years the unparalleled experience of a continuous and vast immigration of population from Bangladesh and, recently, Nepal. It commenced about the time the 1911 census began. During that census, while the population of Goalpara district as a whole increased by 15.6 per cent only, that of a few thanas increased by 70 to 80 per cent, owing

to the extraordinary influx of cultivators from Mymensingh, Pabna, Rangpur and Bogra. The Census Commissioner Mullan in 1931 was led to make appropriate comments on this trend, and he sounded the warning at great length. At the present stage of social and political development in Assam, progressive forces are not likely to have any influence, unless this stupendous flow is checked rigorously. Victimization of those already settled must be prevented. They must be provided with all the safeguards of minorities. But neither the peasant nor the student (now under the thumb of most dangerous cliques of the ruling class) will tolerate a further increase in the pressure on land. Significantly, the Central Government does nothing to stop this flow of population, though it alone has the machinery to tackle it. Nor does it seem keen on diverting the flow to other parts of India with large uninhabited areas.

prospect of semi-starvation, destitution, mounting debts and sordid living without any sign of redemption stares at every lower middle class family... The lower middle class in Calcutta leads animal existence." Even so, it is possible to delude the middle class with hopes of small, immediate gains. The charismatic Prime Minister therefore toils down to Calcutta and throws out words of good cheer. Her vice-regent in West Bengal does his part, heartily pats the backs of his lieutenants arrayed in the youth and *chhatra* squadrons, speaks of money being available aplenty and Calcutta soon flowing with milk and honey; its public parks to be haunts of joy and everything to be lovely soon in the West Bengal garden. Despite all this, the most that can happen from the precipitate and somewhat unplanned development projects is a slight strengthening of the infrastructure of parts of the city. But the fundamental perplexities of Calcutta and of West Bengal will continue to fester.

When Jawaharlal Nehru was going through the phase of his calf love for socialism, he quoted with approval in his autobiography what even that sober ideologist of British Labour, R. H. Tawney, had once said: "You cannot leap over an abyss in two jumps". The contradictions of life have created an abyss, through which a truly revolutionary leap has to be taken, for the abyss cannot be bridged. And one cannot take two (or more) leisurely leaps, for one will simply flounder and sink in the mess below.

The philosophy of India's present rulers, however, is different. Socialism as a shibboleth, by all means; socialism in action to be ever deferred! The Prime Minister or Siddhartha Ray are, therefore, doughty if sometimes rather shamefaced, patrons of the monopoly houses, and irrevocably bound to the status quo. Their stalwart young militants, intoxicated with power, are—exceptions apart—a more than potential 'storm trooper' element.

If the Left was astir, things could have been different. Internecine differences should not have emasculated

## A City Of Gardens ?

L. MUKHERJEE

AT a Press gathering in Calcutta on April 4, Mr Siddhartha Ray expressed his desire to turn Calcutta into "a city of gardens"—to divide Calcutta into four zones and take up a "beautification programme". He also felt that special efforts needed to be made for children's parks equipped with attractive things like toy trains.

Marie Antoinette could not very well be blamed. Knowing the surfeit of confectionery in her royal pantry and unaware of the meaning of the bread famine in Paris of 1789, she is said to have asked "Why don't they eat cake?"

The West Bengal Chief Minister, the latest exemplar of "Congress socialism" has much less excuse in regaling the people with fables of beautification of Calcutta when the city sinks under the weight of basic problems. Of course, if the patron deity in New Delhi favours Mr Ray

with some more of her largesse, Calcutta may feebly try to follow New Delhi where mighty fountains spout hundreds of gallons of water while a loud wail rises from everywhere in the city for drinking water. That, however, is not "metropolitan development."

This is not to say that no attention should be paid to the open spaces of Calcutta. But first things should come first. There is no doubt that Calcutta's citizens would want priority for basic needs like ample and safe water supply, adequate drainage and sewerage, proper housing of bustee dwellers, improvement of traffic and transportation and so on. Calcutta just cannot afford a "beautification" programme.

*The Statesman* recently conducted a survey on the living conditions of the lower middle class in Calcutta. It summed up as follows: "A grim

the so-called Left the way they have. The CPI perhaps rejoices that it has a place, however small, in the bandwagon. The CPM, mouthing mysteries that have the least little touch of Marxism, pursues esoteric policies and makes no effort to understand the tremendous radical turmoil which led tens of thousands of young people to plunge into political battle, ready to give life and take it, eager for only genuine basic social transformations. Whether the CPI(ML) movement was misdirected or not is another question. But when political prisoners in jail or in police custody are mown down, there is little more than a minor squeak of muffled protest from West Bengal's vaunted 'Left' circles.

What were the motives and aspirations of these young people? They were not out for jobs for themselves or their like, whereafter they would remain fobbed off political work. Unlike the Congress youth movement

stressing increase of employment opportunities as the absorbent of discontent, they had plumbed for change with a big 'C'.

The putrid little improvements so garishly paraded by the development bodies will mean no real difference to our people. What is important is human beings, not statistical figures; what is relevant is not city beautification but a better life for the citizens. Skyscrapers may grow but the number of pavement dwellers in Calcutta grows much faster. Life for our people—nasty, brutish and short—remains sordid and senseless.

The situation today calls for a total reshaping of the social set-up. Rebuilding of cities will be only part of this social transformation. The loud drums of the State Government may delude the people for a time. They cannot muffle their surging hopes and actions.

The enquiry committee came at an embarrassing time for the local satrap. It was formed when we were reaping the fruits of the third spell of the rule of Delhi bureaucrats for our palpable inability to run our own show without props from Delhi. But the Delhiwallahs did not quite appreciate the dynamism of our native hero and were frankly not sure whether it would be wise to hand the hapless State on a platter to the aspirant. Now that they actually came to the scene they did not exactly find themselves welcome to local bosses who wanted to canalise even the Centre's direct bounty through its agency. As god has been restored in heaven everything should be all right everywhere and any potential benefactor even from the capital is a potential nuisance.

The committee's appointment even at this late hour may well be utilised to thrash out one or two glaringly discriminating practices of the Central Information Ministry. Like the financial institutions of the Centre all the outfits relating to the film industry are located in Bombay. The Films Division has been repeatedly told by short film-makers from this region to decentralise operations on the plea that proper infrastructure facilities in Calcutta in respect of laboratories and other necessary facilities can perhaps only be made available in the State sector which is responsible for exporting Indian films—often meaning only Hindi films. The question of competitive cost is also involved. The Children's Film Society, the Film Finance Corporation and the IMPEC have no local outfit either here or at Madras. Positive efforts must be made by the Centre to effect a change in its policy, not as a matter of charity, but as rational restructuring of the whole machinery. Already the southern region is producing more films than Bombay, and other centres will grow in different linguistic areas. There are other aspects like having archives in the

## Film Events

BY A FILM CRITIC

LAST week the film world was very much in the news and in Calcutta the glittering function of the presentation of National Awards was held for the first time in nineteen years. It was originally scheduled last year but was quietly dropped in favour of Bombay on the plea that Calcutta would hardly attract the denizens of the entertainment world because of the notoriety it had gained.

The function was important for more than one reason. It provided a form for film people to find the powers that be ready at hand. The occasion is generally used by Ministers as a combination of a convocation address to the successful alumni and an annual meeting of some chambers of commerce where all sorts of hortatory references are made along with facile assessments of the performance of the particular sector. This is often compounded of persuasion and mild threats to people to conform

to the 'social objectives' one associates the establishment with. The young Deputy Minister read out a well-drafted speech in which he eulogised the Bengali cinema and singled out for praise practitioners from all the regions who probably in the ghost writer's view merited such mention. A former minister now occupying the gadi of a neighbouring State went one better and bestowed all attention on the local stalwarts perhaps as a sop to the injured ethos of the eastern region for their overwhelming backwardness in other spheres. But the show was stolen by the star performer, the host state's debonair chief whose downright offer of Rs 25 lakhs every year to the ailing film industry of Calcutta made him look like a munificent benefactor to the unwary observer. How far it was aimed to outbid the Centre's enquiry committee which was also in town may however be left to anybody's guess.

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eastern and southern and also northern zones in addition to the only one at Poona. Training facilities whatever available are also confined to Poona and the committee might well have been asked to ascertain why so few have gone there from the eastern States.

Coming to the last topic of the week one should make a passing reference to the Khosla report on the Film and TV Institute of India at Poona which has completed 10 years of existence. The occasion of the enquiry was not so much stocktaking after a decade as the necessity of going into the situation arise out of the strike by students for removal of the Principal. The Principal has meanwhile been provided with another berth by the gracious Government. The Khosla report recommends autonomous status for the institute probably to rid it of direct interference from the Information Ministry. Let us see the fate of it since the AIR fiasco is very much in mind. The report also prefers direct induction of the Principal from the profession with a much higher salary. It would be interesting to see whether eminent practitioners are prepared to oblige Mr Khosla because when a professional is at the height of his power he would be reluctant to leave it for a mere job. The tenure of the head of the institution is proposed to be three years, ostensibly to ensure constant inflow of talent.

What is baffling however is the recommendation that the Institute should have a working relationship with the UGC. There are areas in respect of research and training even in the academic field which do not come under the purview of the UGC. But Mr Khosla would have none of this. Perhaps he has become a little disillusioned. After putting in so much of labour for the censorship business he finds hardly any of his learned recommendations translated by the bureaucracy. So he wants whatever he can lay hands on to be removed to the academic bureaucracy. Little does Mr Khosla know that the

Government is always more eager to appoint committees with eminent men like him at the helm to put away the immediate demands, legitimate or otherwise, and to get learned discourses on them for the consumption of the gullible. Perhaps when a proliferation of committees have put down their views Mr Khosla will be called once again to piece them together for the convenience of the Government to study it in its entirety. And if after that it is considered of sufficient import the Secretaries committee would process it for the benefit of the Minister.

### Letters

#### Defend Prisoners

Allow me to convey my thanks to you for the publication of 'Rotting in Jails' (July 8, 1972) and through you to the correspondent who has ventured to make such a valuable and timely appeal.

I am the wife of Mr Ashim Chatterjee. I am bewildered—I have not been able to find any avenue to help defend my husband in the courts of law as my husband could not give me any clue as to how and where and when to defend him. He does not know what are the charges against him and where. I cannot even move the High Courts of Patna and Calcutta to find out what are the charges against him and where. This requires preparation and involves huge expense.

In pre-independence years the stalwarts of the legal profession volunteered to defend the political undertrials and the public came forward with donations. There must be such benevolent advocates and members of the public who would help defend my husband whose detention is politically motivated. I appeal to the advocates and the public to contribute for the defence of my husband, the cause of justice.

ROMA CHATTERJEE  
Calcutta

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I am the mother of Prithwi Ranjan Das Gupta who has been rotting in Midnapore Jail for more than 2 years and who does not know what the charges are against him and where he would be tried. He has not been produced in any court so far.

I do not have the resources to defend my son, who has been detained on political grounds. I therefore appeal to the legal profession and the public to help these young men to help safeguard democracy, if there is any, in this country.

Please help my son to help yours in the future.

PROTIMA DAS GUPTA  
Calcutta

### Indian Bourgeoisie

Apropos the letter of A Group of Students (June 3, 1972) the main point of controversy is whether the Indian bourgeoisie played or still can play the role of the national bourgeoisie. Who are the national bourgeoisie? What is the definition? According to Kidron (one of the authorities of A Group of Students) the Birlas who supported Gandhi's movement were very vacillating regarding foreign capital. The present position is much worse. A real national bourgeoisie cannot think of short-cut profiteering. The growth and development of the bourgeoisie is the growth of the entire nation.

This notion marks the writings of our economic historians but not the activities of the bourgeoisie themselves. They make sacrifices for growth—for a time they can even stop profit-making. A sense of nationalism should be perceptible in them and against foreign capital they should take a firm stand (in our swadeshi movement this attitude was demonstrated for a brief period). At the same time they utilise foreign help, but discriminately, cleverly. The history of the Indian bourgeoisie, at least since 1916, has seen the opposite trend: gradual collaboration and capitulation.

The national bourgeoisie try to break up the feudal set-up. But the Indian bourgeoisie failed here lamentably. Even in 1972 the ruling class cannot go against the rural rich who in a parliamentary set-up wield the power at the base, the real power. Though the Indian bourgeoisie are at their "mercy", their interests are not the same. The bourgeoisie want to but cannot outmanoeuvre the class of the rural rich. This peculiar adjustment is the legacy of the British past when many bourgeois concepts were introduced in a feudal set-up. The concern of the British for the landlord class should be remembered. This feudal economic set-up and bourgeois political institutions are examples of the socio-political hiatus in this region.

I am unable to understand why the principal contradiction suggested by me is tenable only when it is proved that foreign capital is at the mercy of the top peasantry. Is it at the mercy of the bourgeoisie? Lenin saw contradiction in Russia between the weak bourgeoisie and the proletariat as a principal contradiction, but was foreign capital at the mercy of the bourgeoisie? The contrary was the case. In India also the bourgeoisie are at the mercy of foreign help without which it cannot stand, as they cannot break up the encircling feudal set-up. Does foreign capital make the bourgeoisie national, independent? Does it want to make India industrialised and to

create another Japan? In the Indian set-up any foreign help is ultimately a help to maintain and boost the feudal set-up, to sustain the weakness of the bourgeoisie. Hence the principal contradiction is between feudal exploitation and the rural masses and another between the weak bourgeoisie and other strata of society.

As for adverse items of trade, they are not of recent origin. The trend started at least from 1952.

The arguments of the remaining portion of the letter by A Group of Students is hypothetical and conjectural. They deal with the future—what would happen in such and such conditions, whether the USA would intervene physically in India or not etc. But I am more interested in the present and believe that all would depend on the fate of the Indo-Chinese struggle. America would not be eager to commit itself elsewhere in future. But at the same time the role of Russia and China deserves attention. It is an irony of history that America seeks a face-saving formula to avoid defeat in Vietnam with the help of these two countries. Not only that, China is unable to condemn Yahya's genocide unequivocally. She helps Ceylon and invites her Prime Minister after the massacre of Ceylonese revolutionaries; Kissinger is given a big banquet when Vietnam is bombed brutally. All these show that China prefers diplomacy to ideology. About Russia it is better to remain silent. So it is very difficult to predict what would happen in the future.

ARJUN BANDYOPADHYAY  
Naihati

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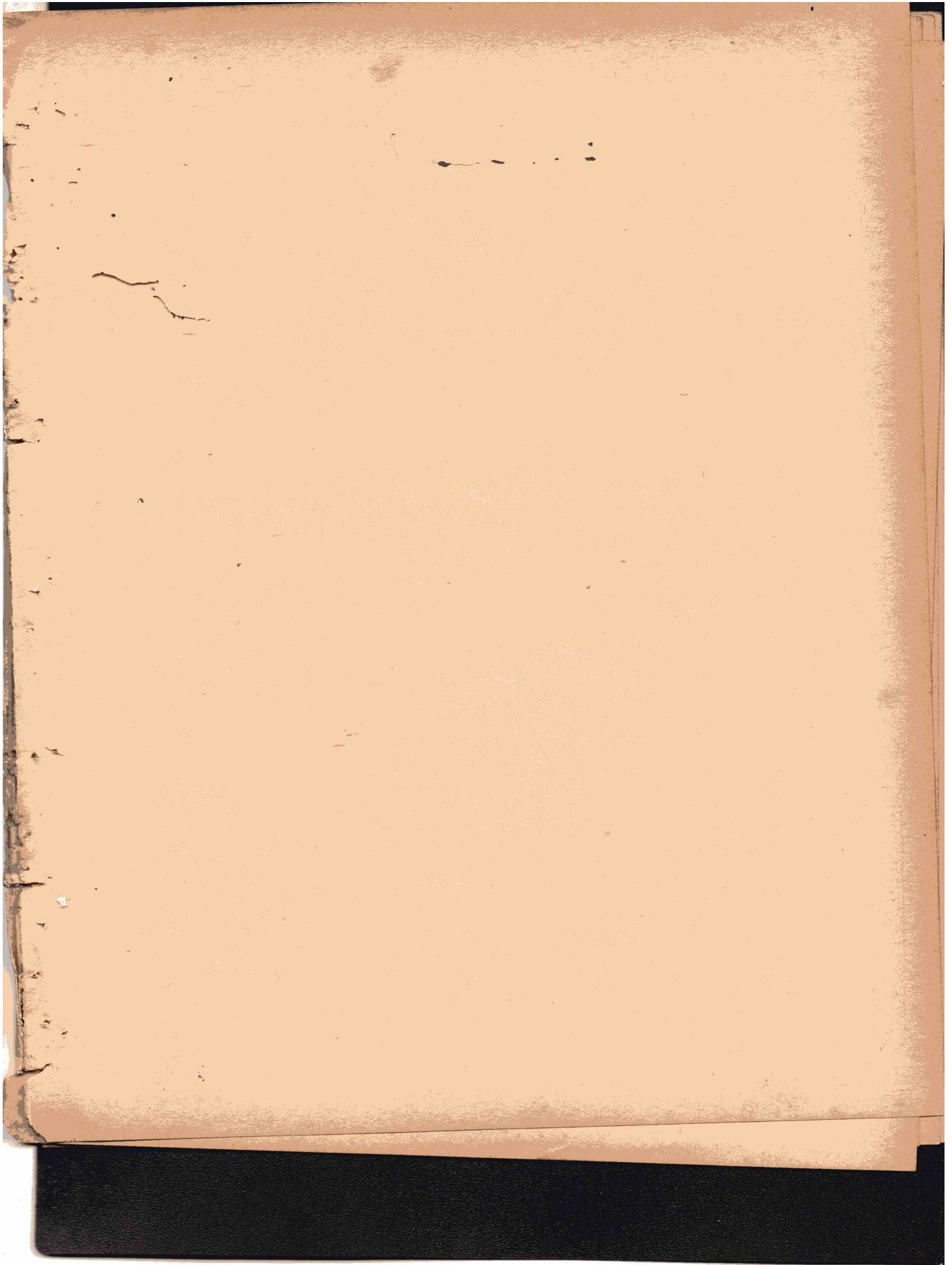
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