

freedom first

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GEETA DOCTOR

SWEPT UNDER THE CARPET

S. V. Raju

THE political hot weather in Delhi has cooled down somewhat after over a month of internecine warfare. At the end of it all or at least at the end of the first round, the combatants have retired to their corners. One newspaper described the relatively peaceful conduct of the National Executive of the Janata Party on July 12 as the beginning of a "second honeymoon". Not quite. A honeymoon, even a second one, presupposes lovers. It is difficult for anyone to describe thus the relationship between the leaders and their proxies in the battle just concluded. It is at best an uneasy truce before the next round begins. The end of round one gives Morarji, Chandra Shekhar and company an edge over their rivals. Charan Singh is out of the Union Cabinet and has yielded to political compulsions by withdrawing his "resignation letter". We are told by learned columnists that it is quite different from a mere "resignation". The additional word "letter" implies that Charan Singh, has in effect, withdrawn the charges levelled by him when resigning from the Executive and the Central Parliamentary Board last April. This is being extremely naive.

The basic issues have not been resolved. Nor can they ever be, given the nature of the Janata Party's composition. There is a theory held by many scholars that, in a country like India, political parties with an ideological base have only a limited role to play. One party dominance they say, can only be ended by having in opposition another party described in political parlance as an "umbrella party" more like the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States. The pre-1969 Congress, which accommodated a variety of shades of political and economic thought and decisions based on consensus was one such until Mrs. Indira Gandhi came along and made it clear that her idea of a consensus was what was acceptable to her.

Those who have followed closely the formation of the Janata Party know that the Janata Party was formed with the limited but crucially important role of restoring the people's liberties and a free society. Apart from this unambiguous position, other aspects of the party's policies were open to various interpretations.

This was inevitable under the circumstances prevailing then.

The word "Party" to describe Janata, which was really a Front in January-March 1977, was a clever election gimmick. The various constituents kept their identities in cold storage while their members repeatedly asserted at innumerable public meetings that they all belonged to Janata and that there was no going back to their parent parties. The word 'Front' had acquired a bad odour after 1967 and 1971 and might not have carried the same conviction. The people wanted an alternative Party, not a Front with many flags and many symbols. They voted Janata not because of the contents of its economic or social policies. They voted for it, as it alone afforded them an escape from Indira and the dictatorship. They refused to think of the consequences if the Janata Party failed to swim together after the elections. At that point of time they could not have cared less. Restore us our liberties, the rest we shall see later, was the demand of the electorate.

Liberties were restored, and the 'rest' now faces the party. It has been argued that what is happening in Janata is really a personality squabble. The leadership is made up of prima donnas who view themselves as more important than the others. To a limited extent this is true. But only to a limited

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IN THIS ISSUE

With the political weather somewhat cooler in Delhi, the Morarji-Charan Singh equation is discussed in the lead article. Geeta Doctor takes a look at recent events in Afghanistan from a historical perspective. We reproduce a piece by Profulla Mohanti from the London Times on the disillusionment with Janata he found in an Orissa village. K. S. Venkateswaran dissects a book by Chandra Shekhar while K. V. Padmanabhan, reviews a book on the days of the British raj.

Operation Topple

July 13, 1978 will go down as a red letter day of sorts in the history of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly. For, on that day, the Assembly saw for the first time blood being shed — the blood of a couple of legislators injured in a fracas in which the weapons were mainly chairs, microphones and the good old fist. The provocation for this violence inside the legislature is not important. What is significant is the fact that one of the last outposts of decent parliamentarianism has fallen a victim to rowdyism. What an example for the younger generation!

The previous day, Mr. Sharad Pawar announced his resignation from the coalition government. He had never hidden his distaste of the Congress(I) partnership. Sharad Pawar's intellectual equipment is far above that of his compatriots in the Maharashtra Congress. He was in fact its theoretician. It is therefore unfortunate that he did not choose to keep out of the Ministry. This would have been the honourable thing for him to have done. The reason he gave for quitting — that the Congress(I) was reaping the benefit of the partnership at the cost of the Congress led by Mr. Swaran Singh — therefore fails to carry conviction.

Chief Minister Vasant Rao Patil swore by the Congress Working Committee decision which permitted him to enter into a coalition with the Congress (I) and vowed he would break the coalition and resign only if the Congress Working Committee asked him to do so. This they did on July 16 and he resigned the next day.

The Congress led by Mr. Swaran Singh found itself being wooed by both the Congress (I) and the Janata Party. Congress (I) Chief N. K. Tirpude offered to support a minority Congress Government if Vasant Rao Patil was the Chief Minister. The Janata Party made the same offer (though they preferred going into partnership in government) if Sharad Pawar was at the helm.

The Congress Working Committee rejected both suitors and took the honourable decision to sit in opposition in the Maharashtra Legislature.

The Congress — Congress (I) coalition was itself a post-election patchwork arrangement that came into existence as a result of some adroit political manoeuvring which caught the Janata Party flat footed. It is exactly the kind of SVD government that discredited opposition parties in the years following the 1967 elections and brought back Indira Gandhi in 1971. No tears need therefore be shed over its demise. But what the Janata Party has done is to replace one SVD regime by another. Clothing such efforts by arguing that it is their duty to throw out the Congress (I) as it continues to justify the Emergency and therefore believes in authoritarianism will fool no one. For, Sharad Pawar would not have taken the step he did had he not been egged on by the Janata Party.

When will our politicians learn that short cuts to power have a way of recoiling on them? No doubt we shall be called idealists or purists or what have you. But would not the right thing have been to

defeat the government on the floor of the House and seek a fresh mandate from the people?

The Maharashtra episode indicates that our politicians have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. They have just delivered another body blow at the democracy which they wish to protect. — SVR

Hare Krishna Hots Up

Barely two weeks ago business was booming at the Hare Krishna temple at Juhu.

Limousines jammed the entrance to the temple as guests filed into the special auditorium built adjoining it to watch performances by top artistes, all signed up, as part of a plan to bring about a renaissance of the traditional Indian arts. Some people wandered about the lavishly built temple, watching the Western devotees doing their dance and chanting routine with carefully unselfconscious abandon, or bought the rich milk sweets that were sold at the entrance. Others were tempted into buying the glossy Hare Krishna literature, printed in California or beguiled into making donations by mini-Hare Krishnaites, predictably angelic looking kids, with blond tufts and miniature saffron robes, who proved to be shrewd sales creatures. A few searched frantically for their slippers, which heaped in hundreds outside the temple, had a way of routinely disappearing.

On Sundays the crowds had to be seen to be believed. A thousand people sat down to a free lunch of pourries, vegetables, kichdi and golden helpings of "sheera" all cooked in the purest ghee, for as a devotee explained "When Krishna gives, he only gives the best." When asked why it was that the majority of people eating the free food appeared to be quite well off, the laconic reply was that "Low caste people don't appreciate high class food."

Whether such ideas had anything to do with the violently anti-Hare Krishna feelings aroused by the incident on Sunday 2nd July where a man was killed there one cannot say. According to a statement issued by the Hare Krishna management, the fracas leading to his death, started over a theft of chappals left outside the temple. The devotees, some of whom are in jail, and the rest, threatened with immediate deportation and even death, by the forces antagonistic to them, who now find themselves in a virtual state of siege within their Ashram, must wonder at the fickleness of the Indian mind. Where are all the people who partook so lustily of the lavish Sunday lunches? Are they waiting for the crisis to cool off before going back for more? Surely the threat by some sections of the society living there, to take over and occupy the temple, hardly sounds like the kind of behaviour that should come from a nation of people that is always telling the rest of the world how tolerant it is in religious matters.

One of the Hare Krishna members who managed to escape describes how he had to spend the first few days on the beach at Juhu after hotels where he had put up ISKCON's guests in the past flatly refused to give him accommodation for fear of reprisals from the public. In an effort to escape unwanted attention he quickly changed into white pyjamas and kurta and covering his shaven head

with a flannel cap started going around in sunglasses making personal appeals to those sympathetic to their predicament. The saddest thing according to him was to find that the majority of their erstwhile supporters put the phone down the moment he tried to talk to them.

Most of the Hare Krishna devotees however have not lost heart and true to their faith have resolved to "leave it to Krishna" to get them out of the tight spot.

On the evening of the Juhu bund, which had been organised as a formal protest against them, however, one spied a young man, in white kurta-pyjamas, carrying a similarly dressed boy on his shoulders, trying to board an airline to get out of the country. There was nothing unusual about them, until one looked further, and noticed the wooden beads around their necks and the silky tassel of golden hair hanging from the back of the boy's head which showed them to be Hare Krishna members. Obviously they felt that it was safer to leave it to Air-India to get them out. — GD

The Plastic Revolution

"There is a need" says Roy Guzzard quoted in the *London Times*, "to rethink urban forms. The city of the future must be clean and green, safe and sound." Nothing very unusual in these sentiments one may feel, until one realises that what Mr. Guzzard proposes to do is to reforest his ideal urban environment with plastic trees. An architect by profession he justifies his recommendations with the remark, "For years I built plastic houses in new towns surrounded by real trees. Now I want to see real houses surrounded by plastic trees."

Plastic trees of course grow greener on the other side of the Atlantic, in the USA, where even plastic grass has been thriving for the last few years. Apparently the only maintenance they need is a little bit of dusting now and then. The major source of plastic foliage is in Korea which can custom make trees to suit a particular environment. The trunks and branches are made of glass reinforced plastic and the foliage of polythene. According to Mr. Guzzard's guidelines the tree would have to be bonfire proof and vandal proof and foliage would have to be made self extinguishing. As a further benefit he felt, that the trees should ideally be mounted in the dead of night, so that on any bright morning, the citizens of a chosen area could wake up and find themselves in the middle of a plastic jungle.

Those living in the Marine Drive and Chowpathy areas of Bombay must already have had a pre-view of this when they found last month baskets of plastic flowers hanging from wrought iron posts carrying advertising slogans. What was astonishing about these flowers was that the blooms in red, white, and blue, all grew out of the same basket, a botanical feat possible only in plastic. Alas, the flowers were not vandal proof, and within a week of their going up, the poles from which they hung were bereft of them. Whoever thought of this scheme must no doubt take comfort from the thought that little baskets of blue, white, and red flowers, must now be brightening so many dark

corners, carrying Mr. Guzzard's plastic revolution right into individual homes. — GD

How to Ruin a Good Thing

Not every foreigner who comes to India is a hidden agent of the CIA or for that matter of SAVAK or the KGB. Most are innocent tourists beguiled by some beckoning poster of the Taj Mahal or the Khajuraho temple in some little tourist agency in their mother country. Others having seen TV stories of the horrors of Indian poverty decided that India is the place where they would spend a few months or even years of their life serving mankind. There are businessmen and professionals from abroad serving one or the other of the maligned multi-nationals or perhaps some State undertaking.

The purpose of all this is to draw the attention of readers to the little village of Maliwada near Daulatabad in Maharashtra, which had the privilege of receiving no less a dignitary than the President of India last June. The President came, he saw and he lashed out — at the foreigners in the village. And thereby hangs a tale.

Maliwada was a sleepy little village near Mohammed Bin Tughluq's Daulatabad. It was like any other village with its quota of poverty, misery and all those things common to thousands of our villages.

The village was picked up by some foreigner who had a yen to serve mankind and soon a society was formed, registered and affiliated to an international service group called the Institute of Cultural Affairs. This latter Institute has 24 community projects spread in various parts of the developing world. One of them happens to be in Maliwada. Don't ask why Maliwada and not some other obscure village. It is just one of those things. Anyway, the result was Maliwada prospered. According to a press report living standards have gone up appreciably. The village boasts a simple saw mill, a food enrichment hutment, a community catering service and a packing case production hut — all cottage industries to gladden the heart of a Charan Singh! Right now the society in Maliwada is busy training volunteers from 43 other villages to start similar projects. Even the Government of Maharashtra was giving its fullest co-operation to the Maliwadians.

One visit by the President of India, and the picture has changed. He expressed his annoyance with the project which according to him was making "tall claims and pretentious propaganda." And why, asked the President, was there need for several foreigners in the venture?

The bureaucracy was quick to seize on the President's word. Red tape, we understand has noticeably increased, and the bureaucrats have "grown suspicious of a project which has the official approval of the Central and State Governments." Eight foreigners whose visas are about to expire have been told that they are not being renewed. Happily it would appear that the exit of these unhappy gentlemen will not destroy the good work done by them because the village "over the past three years has built up its own self-confident leadership". Amen for that. —SVR

A KICK FROM THE HORSE

Geeta Doctor

The year of the Horse, supposed to bring about a period of stability on the Asian continent, has dealt Afghanistan with an unexpected kick, the painful consequences of which are bound to be felt in the surrounding regions also. But that's how it is with horses, the Chinese philosophers who have formulated the twelve yearly cycle will say, they are unpredictable.

Almost everything else about the April 27th coup, now glorified into a revolution, has been depressingly predictable. The tanks rolling down the main streets of the capital occupying key positions, the bombardment of the Presidential palace, followed after a brief period of confusion and silence, by the inevitable announcement about liberating the people from oppression and hailed with varying degrees of enthusiasm by capitals around the world. Indeed this has almost become the accepted form of changing governments in countries with a colonial past, the only variation being provided by the line-up of different countries waiting to recognise the new regime.

Pessimists will of course say that most predictable of all have been the Soviet built tanks and Mig 21s manned by Soviet trained personnel used during the coup and the fact that the new President Mr. Nur Mohammad Taraki and his entire Cabinet belong to the Democratic Khalq Party, described as "Afghanistan's principal Communist faction". In the context of Afghanistan, landlocked, economically weak and located in the soft underbelly of the Soviet Union's Central Asian territories, such pessimism is almost justified. To be sure Afghanistan's neutrality was guaranteed in the 1931 Soviet-Afghan Treaty of Neutrality and Mutual Non-Aggression and in the new treaty signed in December 1975. This, together with the speed with which the new regime took charge and indicated that with Allah's blessings it was back to business as usual and combined with the surprisingly low-key response by the USA, could leave room for hope that all may be well yet. It is no doubt in this spirit that the Prime Minister in a speech at the World Affairs Council and Commonwealth Club in San Francisco remarked with regard to Afghanistan, "In all developing countries nationalism is a stronger force than any ideology and the best way to promote good relations between countries is to respect nationalism."

If India has chosen to turn a blind if not blind eye towards the real nature of developments in Afghanistan it is possibly because there is little else she can do. Unlike the British in the past, she is in no position to take the role of an opponent to play in Asia. The other name of the game is of course "Self Interest" and the consistency with which Russia has pursued its ends in this region makes one feel that nothing ever changes. The Chinese astrologers were right when they described one cycle of events followed by an identical one in endless succession. Only the means change and what was once called colonialism is now termed ideology.

In the 18th century it was Peter the Great and the pretext that he made up to attack Persia sounds curiously familiar. The year 1722 was just right to pursue his eastern ambitions. The Afghans, under Mahmud, of the Galzai tribe, had prepared the groundwork for him by striking a death blow to the tottering Safavi dynasty in Isphahan, which, with its adherence to Shiism, was a perpetual source of affront to its Sunni neighbours. With the last of the Safavis, Tahmasp hiding in the mountains, Peter the Great first made his diplomatic moves by promising to come to his help, for which favour Tahmasp agreed to part with some important provinces around the Caspian. Then Peter sent his ambassador to the court of Mahmud with a complaint that a Russian convoy had been attacked on its way from China by the neighbouring Uzbeqs. Mahmud, who was barely aware that the Russians even existed, replied that he could not be held responsible for what his neighbours did, but by this time the Russians were on their way.

One of the main objectives of the Russian government was to get an access to the warm waters of the Persian gulf as an outlet for its trade which became virtually landlocked in winter. Lest Turkey, another Sunni neighbour of Persia should get similar ideas of attacking a weakened Persia, the Russians signed a treaty with them graciously giving them portions of Persian territory. Peter the Great of course died before realising the full extent of his ambitions, but halfway during the course of his journey southwards, he made a significant remark to one of his generals that gave a hint of his ultimate aims, "Have you ever been in the gulf at Astarabad?" he asked, pointing to a mountain barrier to the south east, "You must know that these mountains extend to Astarabad and then from there to Balkh, Bukhara and Badakshan it is only twelve days journey with camels. Bukhara is the commercial centre of those parts and on that road to India no one can interfere with us."

Thirty years after Mahmud's Persian conquest which soon ended for him in disaster, Nadir Shah a Persian general fished out the last of the Safavis, Tahmasp, from hiding, rallied the people round him, drove the Afghans out of Isphahan, and having dispensed with Tahmasp, got ready for his most well known exploit, his attack on India. As his allies, he took the very Afghans who had so recently plundered Persia, and their combined sacking of Delhi became a synonym for barbarous cruelty. In the process he managed to take an enormous booty, which included the Kohinoor diamond, but when Nadir Shah was killed on the way back to Persia, his Afghan ally took the Kohinoor with him, from where it passed on to Ranjit Singh and the British. More lasting to Ahmad Shah was the possession of some of the territories conquered under Nadir Shah's banner which still forms the basis of modern Afghanistan.

This was the state of affairs when the British came on the scene and as they consolidated their

position on the sub-continent realised that Afghanistan was of strategic importance as "the gateway to India" and that the Khyber Pass from Peshawar, led straight via Kabul to the Russian capital. What they had not reckoned with was the fiercely independent nature of the Afghan tribes who time and time again defied the superior forces of the British. Russian emissaries were never far from the scene setting one tribe against the other. Both the 1st and 2nd Afghan wars were set in motion as a direct result of Russian machinations in the area, but what is more interesting is to note that the 1st Afghan war in 1842, in which the British force in Kabul was decimated almost to the last man, was seen as the first assault on the invincible might of the British even leading, according to some commentators, to the Great Bengal Mutiny fifteen years later. Only the eventual formation of the North Western Frontier Provinces, with the introduction of colonial administration and the laying down of frontiers and boundaries, led to a period of relative stability.

On the other side of Afghanistan, in Turkestan and Uzbekistan, Russia was progressing in much the same way. Except that she believed in grafting vast numbers of her surplus population onto the native population, which was eventually to prove beneficial, when during the era of Soviet Communist transformation these areas were quietly absorbed into the Russian motherland. That the Muslim minority did not entirely like what was happening to them can be seen from the sporadic attempts at resistance which culminated in the Basmachi Revolt in 1918. Though it went on for five years and had some support from the Turkish government, when it collapsed in 1923, the illiterate Muslim peasants were left leaderless. Soviet historians point out that it was "the will of the Muslim peoples themselves" to continue to be a part of Russia and forego their nationalistic aspirations. Though there are no clear accounts, it is believed that all those who did not have the will were deported into various camps in the less hospitable regions of Russia. But there is also reason to think that Muslim aspirations in those areas has never died down completely and both Russia and China, just across the border in Sinkiang, are said to be hypersensitive to each other's interference with the Muslim sections of the population in these areas.

It is in this context that it is interesting to watch the role which Allah is being invited to play in the current game in Afghanistan. The regime was established "in the name of Allah" but in his last speech, coming in the wake of rumours that a right wing opposition is organizing itself, Prime Minister Noor Mohammed Tarakki spelt out who could, and could not, be called a defender of the faith. "We revere those spiritual leaders who are engaged in worship in accordance with the principles of Islam and do not interfere in politics," he said. "However, those who plot against the great April revolution and distort the valuable principles of the Islamic religion we consider them as traitors and will crush them."

The Persians have a belief that as long as they have only two opposing forces to balance they are safe, when the third one comes in there is trouble.

The third, and hitherto unreckoned with force that is coming into power in the region is of course China. Some observers believe that it is China's fears of encirclement, amounting almost to a neurosis, that has led Russia to strengthen its position in the region, first in Afghanistan and now in South Yemen. China has replied with goodwill visits, to calm down an already nervous Shah of Iran, and a Pakistan, distraught with her own internal problems, plus, of course, the much publicized opening of the Karakoram highway. But a study of a map of the region will show that while reactivating the old silk route may have its strategic benefits, these are nothing like those provided by the solid network of roads built by the Russians, in a territory which is also much more accessible.

It is not entirely surprising in the circumstance to find China making somewhat sudden and insistent demands of friendship towards India. There is every reason to believe though, that even while trying to normalize relations China will still carry on her back door tactics and attempt to re-activate the Naga and Mizo problems.

If the situation thus seems fraught with uncertainty for India, to Afghanistan's two closest neighbours, the leftist *coup d'état* must seem the last straw. In Pakistan, General Zia is said to have moved his troops from the West, after assurances from Khan Wali Khan and the dead, former Afghan premier, Daoud, that there would be no more trouble from the border tribes, to Sind in a bid to keep Mr. Bhutto's possible supporters at bay. Now that several Baluchi leaders have been released from detention within Afghanistan they are beginning to renew their struggle for a separate state and with this new situation the Afghan delegate's comment in the U.N. assembly, that the problems of the Pakhtoons and the Baluchis, "will be considered at an appropriate time in the light of the aims and objectives of the April revolution" is hardly likely to create confidence in Pakistan.

In Iran, the Shah is going through a period of nemesis for his high handed authoritarian mode of functioning. In the current wave of student unrest combined with criticism from the Ulema, he has reacted predictably, showing first the iron fist and then putting on his velvet glove. Only a month back, amidst mounting rumours of an imminent coup that would sweep him out also, he threatened that he had until then been too lenient and had not showed his real strength, but this has been followed by a softening attitude towards the press and a turn towards more liberal Parliamentary transactions. In an even more dramatic gesture the head of the hated secret police (SAVAK) has been changed, but whether these are all mere sop to public sentiment, rather than a real change of heart, can of course be debated. The fact remains though that he has been ruling for 37 years, in a country racked by centrifugal forces, during a period of almost unbelievable transformation, and in the circumstances, has proved to be a pragmatic, far-sighted ruler. If there is anything he understands well, it is the power game, a not bad qualification to have in a region where the big powers have indicated that they are willing to play for high stakes.

A GREAT HOPE DASHED

Prafulla Mohanti

I was in the village (Nanpur, Orissa) in January 1977 when a man returning from the nearby town said, "Mrs. Gandhi has called an election." It was a piece of news which nobody was prepared to believe. But soon it was confirmed by announcements on the radio.

Mrs. Gandhi's political moves had always proved right. My Indian journalist friends said, "Of course she will win. Towns and cities may vote against her but the villages will definitely vote for Congress."

I wanted to study the reactions of a village to the election. My own village belonged to a constituency reserved for the Harijans (formerly known as untouchables). So I selected another village in a rural constituency which had no caste restrictions. It was a remote village with a population of 2,500 and had a large number of Muslims and Harijans living as neighbours with high caste Hindus. Besides a Congress and a Janata candidate there was a Communist candidate.

I visited the village for the first time at the end of February, two and a half weeks before the election. It was a quiet farming village with settlements situated on either side of a small canal whose embankment provided the only means of access. It contained a mud track just wide enough for one bullock cart.

It was soon after the harvest. The countryside looked fresh and green. The mango trees were full of blossom. The mud walls of the thatched houses were decorated with rice paste to welcome Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth.

The canal was full of water and the meeting place for the villagers with children swimming, men and women bathing and cattle being washed. It was midday. The farmers were returning from the fields. A group of villagers were sitting under a tree, gossiping. When I asked them who they were going to vote for they became suspicious. "Are you from the Government?" I explained who I was. They became relaxed. "We haven't made our minds up yet. Party workers have just started to come. The village elders will decide a week before the election".

When I asked about their personal views, a thin man replied, "My vote is my secret. But Congress has been in power for 30 years. Prices are going up and we don't have enough to eat. Our children are unemployed. So you can guess who I'm going to vote for".

A milkman was passing by. "Will you vote?" I asked him. "Of course, it's my birthright".

Rights mattered. The rights of the individual became the main issue in the election campaign.

The Janata workers, mainly student volunteers, went from home to home explaining to people how Mrs. Gandhi had murdered democracy.

"For a stable government, vote for Congress"

chanted the Congress workers. "There is no unity among Janata and they won't last long as a party." I thought they took the villagers for granted and did not approach them individually.

"The Janata party is right wing and will not look after the minorities. Congress favours the bourgeoisie" shouted the Communists. "Whatever you do, don't sell your votes", they warned the Harijans.

The Harijan settlement had 20 families. They had no land of their own. Even the plots on which their houses stood belonged to different landlords. They were not educated and did tenant farming, getting 50 per cent of the produce. "We have been voting for Congress because it opened our eyes", a man with four undernourished children told me. "The path to our settlement has always been an issue at previous elections. Politicians make promises but nothing happens."

In contrast the 50 Muslim families were better off. Some owned land, several were educated and worked away from the village.

The three candidates were all high caste Hindus and came from landowning families. They were in their forties, educated and neatly dressed.

The Janata candidate had been an active member of the Youth Congress until he opposed Mrs. Gandhi. At the 1971 parliamentary election he was a Congress candidate for another constituency, but was defeated. During the Emergency a warrant was issued to arrest him but he went underground.

The Congress candidate was a member of the state legislative assembly (MLA) and a friend of the Janata candidate who had helped him during the past two elections.

The Communist candidate was also an MLA representing the Communist Party of India. He supported Congress and the Emergency until the interests of his party were affected.

As election day came nearer the atmosphere of the village grew tense. Market days were exciting. Political workers came with banners, posters, leaflets and loudspeakers. The noise was overwhelming. But the villagers went on buying and selling, completely undisturbed.

Eminent people came to speak. I was present at a Janata party meeting. After many months of silence during the Emergency this was the first opportunity for the villagers to listen to politicians opposing the Government. So people came in large numbers from the surrounding villages. I was impressed by one speaker's skills to communicate with the villagers.

He accused Mrs. Gandhi of dictatorship. "Now there are two laws one for Mrs. Gandhi and one for us. We have no right to say anything against her. The police can arrest you and you can't open your mouth. Those who brought freedom to this country were put in jail. They were called traitors because

they didn't agree with her. The Congress President said, "India is Indira and Indira is India." India has rivers, lakes, mountains, trees and paddyfields. Has Mrs. Gandhi got all these? If two trees fell down can we say that Mrs. Gandhi's two teeth fell out? If you don't vote for Janata this will be the last election in India's history. We will spend the rest of our lives in jail. So it is not only the future of India but also our fate which is in your hands."

People listened silently and clapped when they liked what he said.

After the meeting I asked a villager what he thought about Mrs. Gandhi and her son. He said he did not like family rule. "It happened during the time of the maharajahs. What qualifications has Sanjay Gandhi? He came to Orissa recently and lakhs of rupees were spent to welcome him. Why? Only because he's the son of the prime minister. My son is more qualified than him but he's unemployed."

In the end the fight was between Congress and Janata. The main point of discussion was always the rights of the individual. All the villagers I talked to did not like political arrests. But the Emergency had not affected them personally and there were no excesses of family planning.

Only 30 per cent of the villagers could read or write. So party symbols were important. The Congress symbol of a cow and a calf was familiar. But Janata was a new party with a new symbol a farmer carrying a plough within a wheel. Janata workers took advantage of this. "If you are a man, you will vote for a man; if you are a beast, you will vote for a beast." They went from house to house with dummy ballot appears explaining to people how to vote. "Have a change. Try us for five years."

One week before the election the price of mustard oil, the only oil used for cooking, doubled in price. This gave Janata another opportunity to attack Congress. "You can only afford to use it as medicine" the villagers were told.

It was generally believed that Congress bought votes. The student volunteers who had been collecting money from the villagers for the Janata party sang, "We say, 'Give a note, give a vote.'" Congress says, "Take a note, give a vote."

I was told that the night before the election was crucial. Congress would try to buy the Harijan votes.

So I waited until midnight in the Harijan settlement in anticipation. But nobody came.

The election took place on March 16. It was a sunny day with blue skies. The booth was open in the village primary school. Men and women in bright clothes waited outside to vote. The atmosphere was that of a festival and there was a great sense of participation. Outside the booth several stalls sold snacks, sweets and tea.

Throughout the campaign the villagers had been cautious in saying who they were going to vote for. "We will vote where our hands move spontaneously and the lucky one will be elected", they told me. Many were sceptical. "Congress will win anyway, whoever we vote for."

Yet people danced with joy when the election results were announced. They had voted for a change and the Janata candidate had won with a majority of 100,000 votes.

I went back to the village in March 1978. Nothing had changed.

The villagers greeted me with a smile. "So you have come to see how we are. But none of the politicians have come. Prices have gone up. Mustard oil isn't even available to buy. The Janata Party made promises to improve the villages but they're busy setting up commissions. Where is the time to think about us?"

"There is so much unemployment and suffering in our village. The change of government is like changing bad wine from one pot to another."

There was a feeling of despair in the Harijan settlement. The landlords took lands away from them soon after the Janata victory so they had to work as day labourers. "Nobody thinks about the poor in this country" the man with four children told me.

The politician whose speech had impressed me so much had become a minister in the State Janata Government. I went to see him in his luxury bungalow in Bhubaneswar, the state capital, to convey the grievances of the villagers. My appointment was at nine in the morning. When I arrived he was surrounded by people who were throwing requests at him from all corners of the room — jobs, transfers, action against corrupt officials, etc. The minister saw me and asked me to wait. At 10.30 he said, "You can see how chaotic it is here. Come to my room at the Secretariat at 11.30."

I got there on time, but the minister had not arrived. I waited until two in the afternoon. Still there was no sign of him. His secretary told me that the minister was due to leave that afternoon on a three day tour. So I left.

I bumped into him accidentally a few weeks later at a religious gathering. "Why didn't you come to see me?" he asked. When I said that I waited for three hours, he replied: "You can write that in your book."

"Then you won't let me come back to Orissa", I joked.

He paused a little and said: "A man came to bathe in a river. He thought the water would be cool and refreshing. But instead he found an ocean with roaring waves. He was frightened."

The parable is indeed frightening. It can be interpreted in many different ways.

The MP for the village said he was disillusioned and felt helpless. "Politicians, bureaucrats and capitalists who form half a per cent of India's population decide the future of 600 million people."

The villagers said: "We'll give Janata two years. If they don't do what they promised, we'll throw them out. We have been able to remove the mighty Congress. Janata is nothing in comparison."

The election had made them realise the power they had.

— *The Times*, London, May 19, 1978

THE UNANSWERED INDICTMENT

The latest development in the affairs of the Minorities Commission on which we had commented on the front page of our issue last month are the answers given to the questions put in both Houses of Parliament on July 19 and 20. Provoked by several statements made by the Prime Minister in both Houses, Mr. Masani has felt constrained to release the text of the two letters he and his colleagues addressed to the Prime Minister on April 27 and May 9 to which no reply whatsoever was ever received.

The full texts of these two letters are reproduced below :

New Delhi-110001
April 27, 1978

New Delhi-110001.
May 9, 1978.

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your prompt letter dated 3rd April 1978 in reply to my letter dated 23rd March.

2. When we met, you had very clearly said that the Minorities Commission should not be treated as an "attached office" of the Home Ministry. In fact your own view was that it should not be attached to any Ministry at all or even to yourself. I fear that your letter of the 3rd April does not reflect that basic approach.

3. It does not really matter how the Commission is labelled or described. It is the substance of the independence of the Commission that matters. Your letter does not indicate how this independence of the Commission, to which you have referred to in your letter, is to be secured.

4. Two months after coming into existence, the Commission does not have any premises or office in which to function and no staff to help with our work, except the Secretary of the Commission and one Under Secretary.

5. The result is that when I come to Delhi, I share the room which is temporarily given in the MHA to the Secretary of the Commission. Professor V. V. John has agreed to work as a full time member but is unable to function as he has to go to Jodhpur in the absence of an office or even a residence for him in Delhi. We feel greatly frustrated.

6. In the absence of staff, over 600 representations addressed to the Commission have not even been acknowledged. What effect this will have on the public you can well imagine. Quite frankly, we feel we have been placed in a false position. The fault is not of any individual, but of the bureaucratic system.

7. This situation was discussed with the Home Secretary and certain assurances given to us and date lines for actions laid down as in the minutes of the meeting, which are enclosed.

8. We do hope that these assurances will be carried out and that the Commission will be allowed to function meaningfully. Quite frankly, my two colleagues and I feel that if the present position does not change radically and Government do not find it possible to fulfil their obligation to provide or rent suitable office premises for the Commission by 31st May, we shall reluctantly have to consider requesting you to relieve us of our membership of the Commission. I trust you will appreciate that this is a measure of our distress at not being able to fulfil the obligations which we undertook in response to your invitation.

Yours sincerely,
M. R. Masani.

Dear Prime Minister,

One of us as Chairman of the Minorities Commission had written to you on April 27 telling you about the impossible conditions in which the Commission found itself as a result of not having office premises or essential staff and functioning as an 'attached office' of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

2. Since then, there has been a further unpleasant development. On March 30, the Chairman of the Commission wrote to the Education Minister informing him that the Commission had received a Memorandum inviting the Commission's interest in the proposed legislation in regard to the Aligarh Muslim University and saying that the Commission would appreciate receiving a note on the position in regard to this matter to enable the Commission to discuss the subject at its next meeting on April 26 and 27. The Chairman's letter had then gone on to observe: 'Now that the Minorities Commission is seized of this matter, I hope I may assume that further action by Government such as drafting or introduction of a Bill to be introduced in Parliament will not be undertaken till the Commission have had opportunity to consider this matter and make their recommendations'.

3. No reply was received to this letter till May 5, when the Chairman received the Education Minister's reply which was dated 20th April, but which arrived in Bombay as an 'unregistered parcel' a fortnight later with copies of a note on the subject. No reference was made in the Education Minister's letter to any Bill on the subject being introduced during the current session of Parliament.

4. On May 5, Members of the Commission were surprised to read in the press a news item about the Education Minister's announcement in Parliament the previous day about the introduction of a Bill before the end of the current session of Parliament.

5. The Commission have today made a preliminary report to Government on the subject of Aligarh Muslim University in which they have *inter alia* recorded their surprise at being ignored and bypassed on a subject of this nature even after a request had been made that the Commission should be given an opportunity to make their recommendations to Government before legislation was introduced in Parliament.

6. We had responded to your Government's invitation to serve on the Minorities Commission on the strength of assurances given to us that Government attached considerable importance to the Commission's work and would give great weight to their recom-

(Continued on page 10)

'AN EVENING OF SOVIET HUMOUR'

Israel Shenker

WASHINGTON, June 23 (NYT) — The Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies said *nyet* to sober Kremlnology and lifted the curtain with an "Evening of Soviet Humour."

Scholars abandoned minutiae — strengths of leaders, fever charts of rivalries, even Politburo dietary weakness — and delivered themselves instead to the belly laugh. Frederick Starr, secretary of the institute, called experts known to them, who consulted card files heretofore unknown, and prepared — in the interests of disinterested scholarship — to share the gross international product.

Mr. Starr tried to establish scholarly categories: Russians joking about themselves, about the human predicament, and — almost too subversive for words — about Americans. An example illustrating all three types: Two Soviet immigrants meet in New York. "Are you set up yet?" one asks, and the other replies: "No, I'm still working."

One of the first to accept Mr. Starr's invitation was Abraham Brumberg, former editor of "Problems of Communism" and lyricist of the record "My Darling Party Line" (sample title: "Hegel Bagel Lenin and Lox"). Now a guest scholar at the institute, Mr. Brumberg suggested serious, Marxist division of labor: he would tell the jokes and Prof. Stephen Cohen of Princeton would explain their significance.

"Marxism," Mr. Cohen exclaimed. "Marxism was serious for three minutes and it's been funny ever since."

"May we tell jokes in Russian?" Prof. Valdimir Tremi, of Duke University, asked.

"As long as you tell them in English," Mr. Cohen said.

"With a Jewish accent," Mr. Brumberg added, recalling the party militant who said: "Comrade Rabinovich, why weren't you present at the last meeting of the Communist Party?" Rabinovich answered: "No one told me that it would be the last one."

Mr. Cohen reported the theory that all anti-Soviet anecdotes are the work of this single free-booter "Why are there no longer any anecdotes in Moscow?" he asked. "Rabinovich has emigrated."

Gene Sosin of Radio Free Europe remembered that, before emigration, Rabinovich was dragged to the Kremlin. "Rabinovich," Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev pleaded, "don't you know we're trying to establish detente? Don't you know we're working to produce meat and butter to feed our people?" Rabinovich replied: "Comrade Brezhnev, I thought you brought me here to discuss my jokes, not yours."

Mr. Cohen offered what he called the two oldest Soviet jokes. What is the difference between capitalism and socialism? Answer: Capitalism is the exploitation of man by man; socialism is the opposite.

Second joke: Is it possible to build socialism in one country, say Holland? Of course, but what have you got against Holland?

Objecting to revisionism of party one-liners, Prof. Maurice Friedberg of the University of Illinois volunteered what he called "the canonical version." A poor Jew is asked: "Can one build socialism in one country?" Perplexed, he goes to the rabbi, who

consults the Talmud and replies: "Yes, it is possible to build socialism in one country, but one should live in another country."

And then there are the two Communists eager to eradicate religion. They hide in a church while an old *babushka* kneels at the altar and asks God to protect Brezhnev and Kosygin. Emerging from concealment, a zealot remonstrates: "There is no God, *babushka*. Sixty years ago you prayed for the Czar." *Babushka* nods and says: "You remember what happened."

"The anecdote tells us about the real Soviet society," Mr. Cohen suggested, noting that one category of jokes laments the coming of the revolution and another mourns the death of the revolution.

"Is the revolution alive?" a Russian asks, and another replies: "Yes, and on display at the Museum of the Revolution, Monday through Friday."

Aron Katsenlinboigen, a Soviet emigre who teaches economics at the University of Pennsylvania, said that he was struck by the professionalization of humor in the United States — official jokewriters, salaried humorists, sobriety for the masses. Not so in the Soviet Union, he said.

"If songs are prohibited, people sing them, even if they don't have a voice," he said. "If jokes are prohibited, people tell them, even if they tell them badly. In the Soviet Union we discussed politics by telling jokes."

Soviet anecdotes suggest that things could be worse — and will be, a speaker suggested. And the common response is not "How funny!" but "How true!"

Herald Tribune, June 24, 25, 1978

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WORLD NEWS

BANGKOK'S PILL CRISIS

For the past month about 300,000 Thai women have been sweating out the Great Pill Crisis while the crusading birth control champion Meechai Viravaidya did battle on their behalf.

As often in the past, the cry went up last Friday that "Meechai had done it again."

Meechai had outflanked the courts, the government and the Boonma Moving and Storage Company by threatening to get 20,000 women into the streets demonstrating. There is no doubt that they would have been angry, since all of them faced unwanted pregnancies. And in Thailand when Meechai threatens to do something he is believed.

Meechai is such a dedicated birth control advocate he has pledged to have a televised vasectomy after the birth of his second child. He has been shocking his countrymen and women (and children) for three years with theatrical birth control displays, blowing up condoms at diplomatic parties and openly talking about sex to schoolchildren.

In the process he has built up a countrywide non-profit network of subsidised pill distributors in about 8,000 villages with about 240,000 women recipients.

That became a problem for Meechai early this month. The Boonma Company had discovered last January that two big truckloads of pills stored for Meechai's programme were missing. Meechai asked for £50,000 in compensation. The company offered a niggling £30. Meechai brought suit. The company brought a countersuit saying that Meechai had not told them the value or the nature of the pills.

Meanwhile, the company was refusing to release any of the additional pills it was keeping in storage for Meechai. The story reached the local newspapers in the middle of last month when Meechai publicly warned that 240,000 unwanted pregnancies were just around the corner unless he got more pills by June 30.

In a pointed threat to the Boonma Company's pocketbook he estimated that the unwanted babies would cost something like £30 millions in upkeep over the next 15 years. The implication was that the Boonma Company might be liable for that bill.

The company caved in on Friday and the pills were on the way to distributors the next day. The lawsuits are still pending and the Boonma company is still holding 10 million condoms but Meechai had clearly won the pill battle.

George McArthur, *The Guardian*, July 3, 1978.

AGGRESSION AGAINST ANGOLA?

SPR. S. At least, Africa is waking up to the real nature of the Cuban presence. The attack on Zaire's Shaba Province has been the catalyst. Here for the

first time a Cuban-supported force has actually invaded a neighbouring black sovereign state.

No wonder Fidel Castro would now like to make people think that his forces had nothing to do with it. His technique is to say that the invasion was not in his country's interests, and therefore it is logical that his forces had nothing to do with it. This is not very convincing logic, however, and to those who know the overwhelming position of Cuba as far as managing Angola is concerned it is quite impossible that an invasion could have been mounted from Angolan territory without the Cubans stopping it if they had wanted to.

Cuban forces in Angola are now at the same strength as they were three months ago. Castro claims in an interview, however, that somewhere along the line these forces were reduced. He goes on: "But after the Moroccan and French raids into Zaire, we reinforced our troops in Angola to prevent aggression. So what stopped our process of withdrawal from Angola was interference in Zaire".

The double standards involved are so glaring that they hardly have to be pointed out. Cuba's occupation of Angola is brotherly aid, French and Moroccan help for Zaire in a dire emergency is a matter of "raids". No one really supposes that these forces had any intention whatever of attacking Angola, even in hot pursuit, which would have been clearly justified.

"Our mission in Angola", says Fidel Castro, "is the defence of Angola against foreign aggression". But the truth is that the Cuban mission is to keep in power the Marxist regime of Agostinho Neto, which the Angolan people have clearly rejected through their overwhelming support of UNITA and the other liberation forces. There are other *non-sequiturs* in Fidel Castro's latest remarks: he says that three months ago he reduced the Cuban forces in Angola by half and then had to bring them back because of the French and Moroccan raids into Zaire. But he also says that the Cubans have to stay in Angola until "the problem of Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa" has been solved. In other words, they are to remain for the duration. And he finishes the argument with a confirmation of

THE UNANSWERED INDICTMENT

(Continued from page 8)

mendations. We had therefore entered on our work with great zest and high expectations of being able to do some useful work in this field of endeavour in the national interest.

7. The facts to which we have referred in this letter and in our earlier letter of April 27 have led us to the sad conclusion that conditions do not exist in which we can fulfil the tasks that face the Commission. We, therefore, request you to accept our resignations as from 31st May 1978. Till then, we shall continue to do whatever work we can.

Yours sincerely,
M. R. Masani
V. V. John

this: "It is difficult to figure out circumstances under which Cuba and Angola would decide to withdraw our forces from Angola".

"Liberation", says Fidel Castro, referring to Rhodesia, "is a problem of the people of the country involved. It cannot be imported from abroad". He may be referring to Rhodesia, but it is a doctrine which ought to be applied to Angola. In large sections of Angola, the people are fighting for their freedom — not against a white supremacy regime but against the supremacy of Cuba. Why should this doctrine be valid for Rhodesia and not for Angola?

Swiss Press Review, June 26, 1978.

"ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY"

Tom Gervasi is not a government whistle-blower in the true sense of the word. He did not leave the US army and tell tales about how and why, as a counter intelligence officer, he had been chasing undercover agents in New York.

But when he left the army seven years ago he simply went to the Pentagon and asked for information he thought the American people ought to know — namely where US arms have been sold. The result of his inquiry is a comprehensive list of the staggering amount of American weapons stockpiled by foreign countries. It is published this week as "Arsenal of Democracy".

In the past decade the United States has acquired a formidable lead in the international arms market. Where has the bulk gone?

During the 1970s it went to the oil producing countries. In fact as Gervasi points out, in the same two years, 1974-75 that the US delivered \$2.18 billion worth of arms to Israel she also sent \$3.7 billion worth to Iran a country at peace.

According to recent State Department studies, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait now account for 28.3 per cent of all America's arms exports.

In Latin America, Chile received large shipments of arms from America in the aftermath of the coup which overthrew the Marxist government of Salvador Allende. In the Far East, South Korea has been a steady buyer and Taiwan's 16 million population is literally swamped with US weapons.

Apart from oil producing states America has found a ready market in the developing countries. Gervasi points out that in the four years between 1971-75 America supplied those countries with a shopping list of 3,560 tanks and self propelled guns, 5,240 armoured cars, 63 fighting ships, 22 submarines, 593 supersonic combat aircraft, 460 helicopters and more than 10,000 missiles of various types.

"Developing nations used to complain that if we refused to sell them arms we were keeping them defenceless and dependent on us for protection" says Gervasi. "Now they argue that by selling them arms we keep them equally dependent on us because we keep them poor."

Peter Pringle — Condensed from *The Sunday Times* June 18, 1978.



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DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE by Chandra Shekhar; Popular Prakashan; Rs. 40/-; Pages 182; Price Rs. 40/-).

Scarcely a day passes that we do not witness the indulgence of our ruling clan in a diversionary and purposeless debate on the desirability of urgent governmental action in imposing an all-pervasive stranglehold on organised private enterprise in this country. Characterised as it is by a blatant distortion of language, the whole exercise consists of launching a calculated and systematic attack on what is nebulously referred to as "big business" or, worse still, "monopoly houses". That such pernicious verbiage go largely unquestioned and unchallenged is only indicative of the acute apathy and complacency gripping the enlightened Indian citizenry, whose capacity to take in their slumber any monstrous assault on their invaluable freedoms, has become almost proverbial.

There is an unmistakably sinister intonation to the loud-pitched utterances of the concept-ridden propagandists. Masquerading as "socialists" of various hues and colours, these advocates of governmental intervention invariably press into service a line of argument which follows the traditional pattern. The business community, they urge, is the fountainhead of corruption, that the growth of private enterprise necessarily spells the growth of monopolistic tendencies and concentration of economic power to the common detriment. As is to be expected, the emphasis is always more on hyperbole. Regrettably, the employment of pejorative terms and misleading Marxist jargon, replete with soft and seductive catch-phrases, has by an insidiously soporific effect, succeeded in beguiling the vulnerable Indian masses, so much so that any attempt at an honest appraisal of the crucial issues involved today meets with annoyance to arrogance and disdain.

In the context of the renewed vigour with which the methodical smear campaign against private enterprise is being currently pursued in this country, the appearance of a collage of writings by one of the most ardent apologists of the socialist order, Chandra Shekhar, assumes an especial significance. Here, at least, is no political innocent. Having been an important member of the ruling clan for well over a decade, Chandra Shekhar has all along had a ringside view of the see-saw game which has been a pre-eminent feature of our economic policy ever since independence. Not infrequently has his principled unwillingness to acquiesce in the patently unscrupulous acts of his partymen evoked strong resentment and reprimand from those in the upper echelons of power who saw in his protestations a serious threat to their colourable actions. It is hardly any surprise, therefore, that his pungent analysis of national economic issues should be tempered by a concurrent feeling of rancour against those wily politicians whose pronouncements and performances were light-years apart.

The central theme of Chandra Shekhar's diatribe against free enterprise stems from his unshakable conviction that the root cause of our economic ills is directly traceable to the existence of monopolistic trends in organised private industry and the relative affluence of a miniscule section of the populace. According to him, the efforts of private enterprise in India as a whole are constantly devoted to exploiting the masses and "smashing the very fundamentals of our social and political life", whatever that means. Understandably, therefore, he spares no effort in tarring the whole business community with the brush of guilt and condemnation. He is unequivocal in his advocacy of a regimented economy where the means of production are vested solely in an all-powerful State and where the worth of the individual is subordinated to the State so completely that the content of freedom ceases to have any significance at all.

The major fallacy underlying such a line of thought arises from the fact that Chandra Shekhar, like many of his ilk, seems to see a banal dichotomy in the very existence of a mixed economy. It could hardly have been a coincidence that even the very architects of free India, the founding fathers of our Constitution, with their infinite vision and sagacity, failed to observe any such dichotomy. Especially noteworthy is the fact that as ardent an advocate of the redistributive philosophy as Jawaharlal Nehru — that high-priest of socialism in India — unambiguously expressed himself in favour of a mixed economy in which nationalisation was to be resorted to only when it was absolutely necessary in the national interest. "There is no choice before us," he said, "between having a private sector and allowing and encouraging it to function, and not having it at all. It is foolish to have a private sector and then to undermine it and prevent it from functioning. I personally think that even for the proper functioning of the public sector, it is desirable to have a competitive private sector."

Chandra Shekhar is highly critical of "the pre-eminent emphasis on growth and production to the utter disregard of equitable distribution" for, according to him, "the problems of poverty and underdevelopment, and even hunger, are not due to shortages of physical resources but due mainly to economic and social maldistribution within the nation and amongst nations." None has realised the irrelevance of this argument more than Dr. Freddie Mehta, one of India's leading economists, whose observations in this regard merit recall. "Tracts after tracts," he said, "are elaborated on 'poverty' as if growth has nothing to contribute to its mitigation; a whole approach to planning is evolved in which there is not even the barest mention about stepping up the tragically low rate of India's economic growth; even priority projects are held up for years on the mysterious belief that to be pro-poor is to be anti-growth, and only the redistributive measures are stressed. Yet a closer examination of the writings of the 'poverty economists' will show on the basis of their own facts and figures that, in nine out of ten cases, it is the low rate

of growth that is responsible for most of the problems that worry them. Yet there is a curious ambivalence when it comes to stating this fact."

Woefully enough, the one vital point which economic analysts like Chandra Shekhar conveniently ignore is that the more palpable peril to healthy economic growth in India materialises from the opaque ignorance of our puny politicians whose obsession with semantics is phenomenal. When purblind ideology masquerades as "progressive politics", the result is inevitable that economic growth will continue to be the ever-receding mirage that it has so long been.

K. S. VENKATESWARAN.

PLAIN TALES FROM THE RAJ, edited by Charles Allen; Futura Publications Limited, London.

The British seem never to be weary of reflecting and talking about their links with India. In the earlier days, the pioneers who laid the foundations of British rule in the country were too pre-occupied with their duties to find the time to indulge in writing diaries or recording memoirs. Even then, some interesting reminiscences have come down to us depicting the life and times of the British settlers and others in the 18th and the 19th centuries. The habit grew and what was once a trickle became a flood in the post-Independence era.

This is not so surprising, since, in later years, the governance of the country had been taken over by a more enlightened set of administrators, who, apart from being conscientious, were brilliantly articulate. These were men from some of the more prestigious Public Schools or of the two leading Universities, Oxford and Cambridge. It was they who shouldered the enormous task of bringing peace and orderliness in a strife-torn country and in laying the foundations of a sound and just administrative system. While they worked hard, they also found time to engage themselves in various types of sports or to hunt or travel. In summer they repaired themselves to the Hill stations or went on Home-leave. They or their wives (or sisters or daughters) kept diaries or jotted down observations which later came out in delightful reminiscences, or romances, or serious treatises.

The book under review is edited by Charles Allen who has long-established family connections with India which dates back to the battle of Seringapatam in 1799. His great-grandfather brought the young Rudyard Kipling to work on his newspaper, *The Civil and Military Gazette*.

The tape-recordings from which this anthology is composed were made originally for a series of programmes for the BBC which were broadcast in 1974. More than sixty men and women — all survivors of the British Raj — were interviewed by Mr. Allen. These include many distinguished persons like, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, Sir Olaf Caroe, Sir Conrad Corfield, Sir Percival Griffiths, Mr. Ian Stephen, Sir Gilbert Laithwaite, Mr. Philip

Mason (Philip Woodruff), and Sir Penderel Moon. Lesser mortals included planters, private soldiers, nurses and missionaries. Some of these persons had themselves left splendid accounts of their life and work in India. The excerpts which figure in the book are characterised with considerable candour, wit and humour.

What the editor attempts is to portray the life-style of a set of persons who are told to act and behave as superior to people of the land. This may have been dictated by the idea of self-preservation, but it isolated the British from the common man in India and led to their eventual elimination. For the duration, they lived in a sort of rarified atmosphere consorting only among themselves, patting each other's back in a euphoria of self-satisfaction. In the result, their children lived in isolation smothered by the ministrations of Ayahs and dressed in styles unsuited to Indian conditions. One feels sorry for the little girls who had to wear starched frilly dresses and going to parties, clutching milk bottles containing boiled milk as "nobody trusted any other mother to boil the milk properly".

Yet another category which languished in inertia was the British Other Ranks (BORs) the common soldiers who were most of the time in their barracks, mainly to keep them out of mischief. They also felt superior ("after about half a year they were four feet above the ground"), as they were served hand and foot by a host of Indian servitors, known as the *wallahs*. The day started with the *nappy-wallah*: "he shaved you and you never had an idea until you woke up all nice and clean-shaven and with a

(Continued on page 15)



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(Continued from page 1)

extent. Another theory put forward is that it is essentially a struggle between ex-Congressites and those that belonged to the pre-Janata opposition parties. This also has an element of truth in it despite the Jana Sangh's support to the Prime Minister in his struggle with Charan Singh.

Even accepting the fact that Charan Singh has received a raw deal and inadequate recognition of his importance commensurate with his stature and political muscle and therefore had reason to feel sore and chose an early opportunity to insist on his place in the Janata sun, the fact remains that the Morarji Desai-Charan Singh duel has indeed ideological overtones. With Chandra Shekhar thrown in on Morarji's side, the ideological issue grew sharper.

Charan Singh has always been a farmers' man. A mass circulated weekly describes him as the champion of the *kulak*, as if this was a crime. It goes on to say that while the very rich and the very poor in the North, particularly U.P. are with Mrs. Gandhi, the 'intermediates', that is the middle class farmers, who unfortunately are prospering, are with Charan Singh. But the fact remains that Charan Singh's record has been consistent. Agriculture first, everything else later. It is in this context that one must view his statement that the real contest is between Nehruism and Gandhism.

Morarji and Chandra Shekhar are very much Nehru in their economic philosophy, Morarji perhaps a little less than Chandra Shekhar. But Morarji Desai, it must be recalled, faithfully carried out every one of Nehru's policies without raising any objection, at least not in public. Chandra Shekhar

has even as President of the Janata Party, referred more than once to Nehru's economic policies as having been beneficial to the country.

The Jan Sangh's economic convictions have always been pliant. Just as Vajpayee sees no contradiction in his carrying out a foreign policy quite at variance with what he himself once advocated while in the opposition and what his erstwhile party espoused, so too they would be equally at home in carrying out any economic policy — be it Nehru socialism or that advocated by Gandhiji.

The socialists are closer to Morarji-Chandra Shekhar than to Charan Singh, but then, in the power equation among the top hierarchy of Janata, they do not count for much. Hence their role as mediators, for they pose no threat to either side.

One thing both Morarji Desai and Charan Singh have in common — a stubborn streak and an authoritarian temper. This makes it all the more difficult for both to be in the same team. Almost everyone had faulted Charan Singh with having issued his statement on Indira while being part of the Cabinet. To anyone familiar with political tactics this makes sense. Charan Singh preferred to go out not on the basis of a personality wrangle but on an issue. And what issue could be better than the question of bringing Mrs. Gandhi to the bar of justice?

A numbers of issues have been raised including the Kanti affair and Charan Singh's demand that the Prime Minister should clear the air on this matter. Once politicians are on the warpath, every issue is grist to the mill. Every issue is a bargaining matter. One could argue endlessly the merits or otherwise of each issue raised without any solution being reached. The fact of the matter is that parties with

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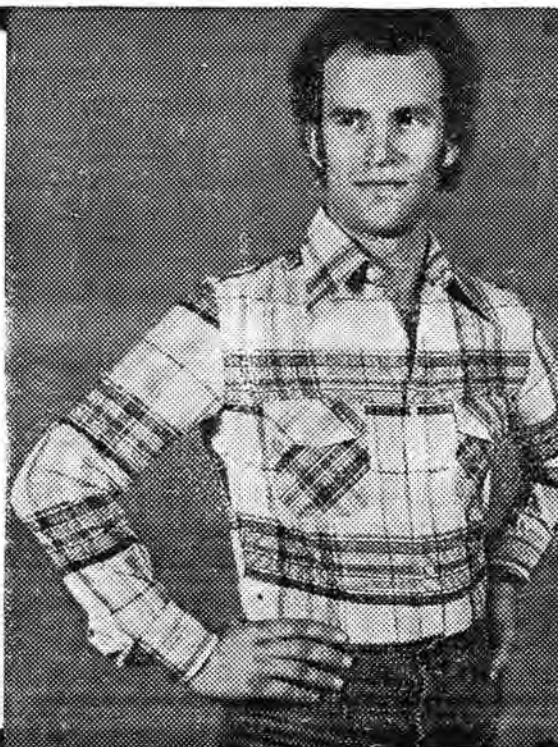
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different ideological moorings got together to face a common enemy. The enemy was defeated and the time has come for them to come to grips with their contradictory positions on economic and social policies. Janata will live or die on how it meets this challenge. Consensus, one columnist has pleaded, is the only way for Janata. But how does one have a consensus on a basic issue, like a choice between socialism and Gandhism? Perhaps one way out is to have minimum party diktats like minimum government which Gandhiji advocated. Does a political party, particularly if it is to be an umbrella party like Janata, have to prescribe on every topic under the sun? Does there have to be a party line on everything?

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face like a baby's bottom." "With the sun-up came the reveille when the *char-wallah* came round with a big silver urn and poured out the tea in mugs at the bed-side". There were the *dudh-wallahs*, the *ham-wallah* and the *sweet-wallah* to assuage thirst and hunger, and other casuals like the *corn-cut-it-wallah*, and the *names-to-put-on-the-kit-bag-wallah*.

Among the groups which figure in these revelations, the Indian Civil Service ("the Heaven-born") get the cake as far as position, power and privileges are concerned. (When a District Collector's wife travelled by train, the guard would not give the signal to start the train without obtaining her permission!) Next in importance came the Indian Political Service and the Police. The Top Brass of the Army were in a class by themselves. The mercantile community which was derisively called the *Box-wallahs* came last, even though they lived a more affluent life than the civilians or the military personnel. It was an hierarchical society where the Order of Precedence (the Blue Book) ruled supreme.

How did such a powerful and disciplined body of men lose its grip on the country? Some of them say that they "saw the writing on the wall"; but most of the British in India did not believe that the fateful day would come when they would have to quit. However when such a day did dawn, the vast majority of them accepted the verdict in good spirit and moved out. Even while quitting, they did it with due ceremony and decorum. Parades were held, with bands playing, and the British flag was lowered. "As a final ritual, when the officers and men left Port Said and sailed into the open waters everyone was paraded with their topees on deck and at a given signal we flung our topees into the sea and that was the last of India."

Thus ended the era of Britain's domination over India. But the British association with our country continued and even flourished. There is greater understanding now between the two countries of each other's policies and priorities. Fresh fields of Indo-British co-operation and collaboration are being explored. Books like this can greatly help in promoting this useful trend.

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"The deep

Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world."

—Tennyson

I am first and foremost a kisan, than a chief minister.

—Mr. Devi Lal, *Times of India*, July 5, 1978.

"India is the world's largest democracy" is a statistical myth.

—*Opinion*, June 20, 1978.

His (Mr. Sanjiva Reddi's) present role was to say "shabash" to whichever party was in power.

—Mr. Sanjiva Reddi, *Indian Express*, July 8, 1978.

I do not believe that sticking one's head into the sand is the best solution to difficult problems in the world.

—*Time*, July 3, 1978.

The Prime Minister must be living in a paradise of his own creation if he thinks that the present troubles are merely governmental.

—Acharya J. B. Kripalani, *Times of India*, July 10, 1978.

The other day I heard a Bulgarian claiming that his country had achieved the highest ideal of Marx-

xism in providing the maximum leisure for workers in their country. Have we not done so in ours?

—Mr. T. A. Pai, *Indian Express*, June 7, 1978.

In recent years it has become perfectly clear that the dogma of one man-one vote has become one barbarian-one bayonet-one baby.

—Mr. Ian Lloyd, *Indian Express*, June 28, 1978.

Up with whisky, down with pissky.

—K. K. Toofan, *The Sunday Times*, July 2, 1978.

If an individual became the party, the party the Government and Government the nation, it would lead to dictatorship.

—Mr. Raj Narain, *Indian Express*, June 22, 1978.

I wrote somewhere once that the third rate mind was only happy when it was thinking with the majority, the second rate mind was only happy when it was thinking with the minority, and the first rate mind was only happy when it was thinking.

—A. A. Milne, *Manjivani*, June 7, 1978.

A useful pendulum only swings so far.

—Mr. Fred Silvester, *The Times*, June 1, 1978.

Only a combination of democracy, the rule of law and adherence to the concept of limited government, can preserve us as a free society.

—Sir Keith Joseph, *The Observer*, June 11, 1978.

I find that the only thing that really stands up, better than gambling, better than booze, better than women, is reading.

—Mario Puzo, author of *the Godfather*, *Time*, June 26, 1978.

Solzhenitsyn has been through something very much like Hell. His imagination is fixed on an image of Heaven. It is to be expected that when he turns to our halfway world he will see it in colours of flame red and dazzling white, and that the colours in between will seem to him to be illusions.

—Prof. Sidney Hook, *Time*, June 26, 1978.

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