

March of the Nation

That's the way it is... A.G. NOORANI

ELECTION

Free-For-All & Unfair

To elect means to choose and choose in freedom. There is no greater obstacle to freedom of choice than in an atmosphere of fear whether bred by the violence of political parties or the power of the state.

It seems that in West Bengal the impact of the former is belatedly being felt. The press note issued in Calcutta on February 15 is an unusual document in that it takes note for the first time of the avowed aims and policies of the CPM, although even this is a partial recognition.

The press note recalls the speech reportedly made the day before at Dum Dum by CPM leader Jyoti Basu to the effect that "attacks on the CPM would be met by counter-attacks and death by death". He was also reported to have declared that his party was preparing a list of those policemen who had been "conspiring" against it and that they would be "treated accordingly" when the CPM came into power.

The question one should ask the authorities is: Are you surprised? Assume that Basu did not make the speech at all. There is yet ample material both in the speeches of its leaders and the policy documents of the CPM, together with its record in the West Bengal and Kerala Ministries, which leave no doubt in one's mind that the CPM will indeed use terror as an instrument when it deems fit and pervert the police service of the State for the Party's ends.

For that matter the CPI is no better: only for tactical reasons it prefers to play in a low key. This is the problem facing us for the last two decades — the use of the democratic process by parties determined to subvert democracy. They have been allowed a free rein.

As against this, note the report by The Hindustan Times New Delhi Correspondent in

makes no sense one day to soothe the critic by holding out assurances of respect for the right to property and the next day to talk about "revolution".

Blank Cheque

In the ranks of Cong-O confusion is no less rife. Mr Nijalingappa, its President, has expressed the hope that the four-party front would stay together even after the elections. The SSP, to cite one partner,



M. R. Masani

has given no ground for this hope. On many a point this avowedly socialist party is at odds with its partners.

Nijalingappa proceeds to declare that after the poll the parties in the Grand Alliance would be able to evolve a minimum programme and form a stable government if they are returned to the Lok Sabha with an absolute majority. "I think after March we will understand one another better".

This is a bit too much. The electorate is asked to give a mandate to a coalition but it is told that the coalition will forge a programme after receiving the mandate. Meanwhile, it should content itself with the joint declaration which is about to be issued.

In sum, the electorate is asked to sign a blank cheque. As we have noted before, Cong-I has also declined to spell out precisely what changes in the Constitution it contemplates.

MASANI'S REGRET

Swatantra Chairman M. R. Masani, noted with regret in his Delhi speech that the formation of electoral fronts had not, as he had hoped, led to the polarisation of political forces into clearly defined Right and Left groupings but had only resulted in proliferation of candidates.



S. Nijalingappa

Whether such a polarisation is beneficial to the body politic is very doubtful. Certainly the kind of alliance for which he so ardently worked was itself a concord of socialists and non-socialists.

But, what one must deplore is that the rival fronts have not even led to a definition of issues or a clarification of policies. All that they have thrown up are a few images and these are none too clear and sharp either.

This is a great pity. Perhaps the fault lies deeper in the character of our political parties. Here and there a voice is heard saying that after the elections a new party will emerge. Will the situation improve at all if the new party is yet another grand coalition, only more closely knit? What we need really is a definition of issues and in this the informed citizen can help no less than the publicist and the politician.

PM FOR "REVOLUTION"?

He must keep vigil on the fairness of the poll and scrutinise carefully the statements of the political parties and their leaders. The Prime Minister talks of following the "middle path" one day and thereafter goes on to say that nobody on earth can prevent "revolution" for socialism in India, but it is better, she kindly adds, if it happened in a non-violent and constructive way. Does she realise what effect all this will have in a situation like ours? Bring about a peaceful revolution else a "violent revolution" is "imminent".

Is the Cong-I manifesto a blue-print for "revolution"? What exactly does the Prime Minister mean by this word? Very aptly has Raymond Aaron called it the opium of the intellectual. It

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