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SEVEN

CONFUSION & CHAOS

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

There is utter confusion on the electoral front and total chaos in West Bengal to the point where it is uncertain whether the poll will be held as scheduled.

Look at the electoral front. The Prime Minister contradicts herself repeatedly and the Grand Alliance issues a declaration which says nothing at all about policies. Both camps are divided.

As G. K. Reddy of The Hindu very perceptively points out: "An ironic feature of the Congress-I campaign is that in their heart of hearts neither the Rightists nor the Leftists in Mrs Indira Gandhi's camp really want her to get an absolute majority in this election." Each faction wants her to be dependent on parties outside which it considers to be like-minded. The Prime Minister's position is unenviable.

Meanwhile, she goes about one day branding capitalists and former princes as demons to be exorcised and the next day as ones who would be preserved in flight through under some restraints.

On February 18 she said at Godhra that she had no "grudge" against capitalists. If through Socialism the lot of the poor was improved, it would only benefit capitalists, she soothingly added.

The news agencies report: "She urged the industrialists not to misunderstand her. She had no intention of snatching away their property, she said."

But only two days earlier at Imphal she had said that "her Party had waged a war against

capitalism, which perpetuated inequality among people, and no force on earth could deflect it from the path." War and Peace are not compatibles.

On February 18 at Dabhoi she was categorical: "We are not against either Maharatras or capitalists." Nothing was to be taken away from the "haves"; only the "have nots" were to be given something, she said.

As CPI's New Age wrote: "It is a mystery how she proposes to fight capitalism without fighting the capitalists... after all she must remember the old proverb — you can't run with the hounds and hunt with the hare."

ALLIANCE'S DECLARATION

The four-party Alliance of Congress-O, the Jan Sangh, the SSP and the Swatantra Party issued its long-awaited declaration in Delhi recently.

"Realisation that democracy is in real danger", it says, led them to achieve "a maximum measure of common agreement on candidates". If returned to power "the parties who have joined this Alliance are resolved to give the people a government wedded to the cause of political, economic, social and secular democracy, the integrity and independence of our country, and its speedy economic and social progress."

This is a statement of ideological

not of policy or programme. It is clear that in the debate within the Alliance, M. R. Masani's plea for evolving a minimum programme of an alternative government has lost out to the SSP's doctrine of toppling.

George Fernandes has well explained his Party's policy towards the Alliance and its partners. The SSP wants electoral adjustment, but "this adjustment should not involve working out a minimum programme. For, we believe that each party must place before the people the programme for which it stands and seek their mandate".

The question of a common programme arises "only at the time of fighting the elections. There is no reason to saddle the victorious parties with previous commitments on the basis of programmes of those parties which may be wiped out by the people in the elections."

This is sheer cynicism. It is fallacious to think that a common programme will be the programme of any single partner in the Alliance. It will represent the agreed programme of the joint entity.

Fernandes ought to realise that democracy means popular support for State policies and that the whole object of an election is to seek such support for the government to be formed.

Parties must commit themselves singly if they go it alone and jointly if they aspire to govern together. The electorate has a right to know.

What will be the coalition's programme? It is not fair to ask for a blanket mandate and then ensure a compromise among the

coalition partners. Particularly if each of the partners has singly been elected on its own distinctive manifesto which in vital respects might conflict with that of the other allies.

Fernandes is of the view that "the Rightist parties have no real alternative to offer to the country". All the more reason for demanding the formulation of such an alternative now.

Fernandes' views, propounded at length in an article in The Hindustan Times, leave no room for doubt about the opportunism that is the SSP. It is a legacy Dr Lohia bequeathed to the Party and which it treasures fondly.

BENGAL CHAOS

When we turn to West Bengal we find a state of utter chaos. The assassination of the veteran Forward Bloc leader, Hemanta Kumar Basu, is only a glaring and outrageous reflection of that state of things.

Mrs Gandhi is hoist with her own petard. If she postpones the poll and admits that her earlier refusal to have an early election there was right, she loses face. If the election is held as scheduled, it will be widely assailed as one held under an atmosphere of coercion.

Mrs Gandhi is herself the architect of this dilemma. She has kept her incompetent favourite, Mr S. S. Deyan, far too long in a post where his incompetence has led to the present anarchy.

The scene at the hospital where Deyan went to express his sorrow at the death of Hemanta Basu reflected the corruption in which he is justly held.