

SELECTED EDITORIALS

FROM

**NOW**

A POLITICAL AND CULTURAL WEEKLY

EDITED BY SAMAR SEN

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JANUARY-AUGUST 1965

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MONFAKIRA e-book edition

Published by Monfakira  
2283 Nayabad, House 8 Lane 1 Nabodit, Mukundapur,  
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## WHY *NOW*?

More important, why at all? Mainly because we believe that there is a need for independent analysis which our Press has not entirely met, a need that has never been so urgent as now, when a feeling of drift is widespread and many con-tending voices are rising to a pitch. There are issues to be tackled here and now, allowing us little time to ponder over the past or the future.

This weekly will not be committed to any party or dogmas. Indeed it is difficult to be so committed, with most parties involved in a process of fission and factionalism. Our commitment will be to certain principles, proclaimed in the Constitution and often in public speaking, but not always practised. Thanks to our aptitude for tall talk and little action, the concept of a secular socialist democracy has almost been reduced to a cliché. The task is to redeem it and to try to point to the cracks that have appeared through public neglect in the house Jawaharlal Nehru set out his heart to complete.

India has a secular tradition but it would be idle to pretend that it could not be stronger. Fairly recent eruptions of communal violence apart, there seems to be a growing undercurrent of revivalism and tolerance in a section of society one would have normally thought rational and progressive. This dangerous growth demands vigilance.

And socialism? It is still a far cry. For most people life is a harsh cold war with shooting prices and misery is still among the widest commonalty spread. That so soon after the death of Mr. Nehru the price situation should be coming to such a head is a shame. There are advocates of temporary retreat, of a sort of

NEP— new economic policy. Others think that we should continue to limp forward, if not leap. The subject is worth a debate.

*NOW* will be a forum for free discussion not only on political, social and economic affairs, but also on literature, the arts and entertainment. It will focus attention on major events and issues, analyse them without prejudice, and judge them without fear. Much of this, of course, will be done by contributors from outside, but only by those who are both able and willing to be free and fair.

More than a daily newspaper, weekly must develop an identity of its own. Partisan weeklies have little difficulty in presenting a streamlined look. Since our aim is to be non-aligned at home, we do not except our identity to be recognised all at once. We want the image to get in focus as we move forward.

Let us start *NOW*.

Vol 1, No 1, October 9, 1964

## WINSTON CHURCHILL

Winston Churchill sprang many surprises in his life; his death this week was not among them. If he were conscious he would almost certainly have quoted that king of England who also had been unconscionably long a-dying. Churchill loved kings; he loved quotations. There came a time when the AIR news bulletins almost ceased to mention him; and the more people thought about him. And the more they wondered, mainly in admiration.

Peace undoubtedly hath its glories; but Churchill was certainly not among them. He had been sent to Harrow. His comment : 'I am all for the Public Schools but I do not want to go there again.' Then, 'three tries to pass into Sandhurst.' During his spell in India (1896) his main accomplishment appears to have been reading Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Being war correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* in the following years was proof enough of involvement in the contemporary world. Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies in the Campbell-Bannerman Government in 1906, Churchill was already a politician who thought it quite unnecessary to conceal his very high political ambitions which could not always be contained within the usually procrustean bed of Britain's party-political structure. He crossed the floor more than once, for reasons other than the noblest. What was clear still was that in the Establishment though he was, by birth and rearing, he could, at a pinch, tear himself apart and stand alone. He would rather work on a book, paint or just lay bricks (not foundation stones) for a castle.

Much in Churchill's life was humdrum— fighting elections, being present at grandchildren's christening ceremonies, ensuring cham-pagne at dinners and cigars and liqueurs after them, repeating alliterative allusions about the greatness of the Empire and the meanness of the men happily living in it. All this was part of the drill of a Tory politician's life of the Edwardian and Georgian periods. Writing of World War I was greater fun than fighting it from the Admiralty. Through the heartbreaking inter-war years, Churchill was listless; perhaps even he did not know that, for him, the best was yet to be. Britain was lucky with this *l'homme the crise* who could afford to wait in the wings.

The historic revolution implicit in the seemingly smooth change-over from Neville Chamberlain to Winston Churchill in 1940 is even today not widely enough realized. Even Churchill did not know what he was doing; witness his total stupefaction at Labour's victory in 1945. To cut a long story short, when Neville Chamberlain handed over to Winston Churchill the marriage of convenience between aristocratic Britain and mercantilist Britain, which had lasted for long years, was ended. From that point on, Britain was never again to think of the war in terms of £ s and d. A reckless aristocrat had taken over. His only goal : Victory. In that pursuit even such scum of the earth as Stalin could be a welcome ally. The Former Naval Person was never in any doubt that, given time, Roosevelt was for all intents and purposes 'in the bag'. For the former housepainter of Vienna Churchill had a contempt perhaps unmatched in history. Hitler's lowly origins may have had something to do with it.

It is never wholly unrewarding to examine events and persona-lities in terms of what is known as the class war, while noting in passing that some individuals in history are capable of rising above class and standing for a whole people in an hour of national trial. The totality of Churchill's commitment, when all seemed lost in those dark days of 1940 and after, is something that has not been seen very often in history. It transcended class, caste, self-interest and all other considerations. Only so full and final a personal involvement could bring

out of the British their total national commitment to stake all until victory was won.

Greatness is not easily defined; to identify it in contemporaries is even more hazardous. Yet as Winston Churchill closed his long life it was impossible not to feel that, with all his blind spots which were legion, India included, there went a touch of greatness without which the whole world is the poorer. The phrase 'cold war' was Churchill's child. Manifest in the two words is his cold detestation of the phenomenon. He much preferred the 'hot war' which, like T E Lawrence's sword, kills but also purifies. We have only to think of our own feeble responses to lesser challenges to know where Churchill's greatness lay.

Vol 1, No 15, January 29, 1965

## WALKER OUT

The very unexpected by-election defeat of Mr Patrick Gordon Walker, Labour's Foreign Secretary, may yet teach Mr Harold Wilson that political impetuosity, often endearing, can be politically hazardous, especially when a Government has a precarious majority. Mr Wilson's political sense had hitherto been believed to be sound; what he said about the winning Tory from Smethwick was generally considered an aberration, almost out of character. It seems equally unlikely that Mr Wilson felt so strongly about the colour question in Britain that he just had to have Mr Walker re-elected from another constituency. Nor is it obvious that, in the Foreign Office, Mr Walker was considered absolutely indispensable; a substitute has been found in Mr Michael Stewart with almost unseemly haste.

Mr Wilson is under no obligation to tell anyone in advance when he will again go to the country. Go to the country he has to, fairly early. But even the defeat of Mr Gordon Walker was further evidence that the small majority of three or four enjoyed by Labour in the House of Commons had not so daunted the Prime Minister as to render him impotent or even hesitant. Not that pipe alone; nor that chin alone; the 'image' undoubtedly sprang from a series of bold acts and pronouncements in face of difficult circumstances of which some at least had been left behind by the Tories. Mr Wilson will also have realized by now that any PM who moves into No 10 these days does so with a couple of rather heavy iron balls chained to his ankles. Be it Conservative or Labour, a new Government is very much a prisoner of its predecessor's past. Mr Wilson's stubborn insistence on Mr Gordon Walker once seemed an indication of a new foreign policy none else could have carried out. The joke did not last too long, perhaps with no great harm done to any party concerned.

In foreign affairs, Labour doubtless has a somewhat different note to strike from the usual Tory band; the difference, however, is less sharp than it used to be. British troops in Malaysia need a little more explanation than has so far been vouchsafed; and there is no way of knowing that a Tory Government would have reacted differently to Konfrontasi. Sameness is all, the cynic might say. Mr Michael Stewart has ahead of him a job that he has to sort out more at home with Mr Wilson than with colleagues abroad whose foreign policies seem capable only of minor variations. Perhaps Mr Stewart is not on the brink of any great change either.

Vol 1, No 15, January 29, 1965

## THE BURMESE APPROACH

Leaders of the Revolutionary Government of Burma may or may not have faced the world with a smile on the seventeenth birthday of the republic. One is told of long queues turned back from the new People's Shops; of stacks of black money; and of wild men in Rangoon, cut off from the areas of light, kicking Indians into the sea in between mad bouts of socialist planning.

Luckily for Burma, what goes on there is not quite what one thinks. The Burmese believe in 'positive neutrality', not isolationism, though they have renounced some quaint Oriental customs like clinging to the Commonwealth, and using English as the teaching medium. They do not go in much for world politics : getting Burma's socialist experiment off the ground is a whole-time job.

Production figures for 1963-64 indicate a real shortage, but the distribution bottleneck is the worst. The villages are better off than cities. How much of this is due to the socialistic pattern itself and how much to administrative shortcomings is worth investigation. This would be relevant for other Afro-Asian States with similar problems. What has to be grasped is the fact of sabotage. The ex-propriated businessmen who precipitated the bank take-over in 1963 by organising runs have moved on to higher forms like the massive evasion of loans and taxes, and artificial shortage and blackmarket tactics. A drastic measure like the recall of K100 and K50 notes was needed to neutralise the hoarded currency.

This is what the Government means by 'economic insurgency'. The steps to meet it were evolved as part of the new Burmese de-sign for living. 'The Burmese Way to Socialism' (May 1, 1962) and the Blue Book of the Burma Socialist Programme Party are not Marxist documents. We have here an eclectic, humane, common-sense approach with a hard-

core economic policy for avoiding the horrors of the traditional capitalist path. 'Socialist economy is the planned, proportional development of all the national productive forces.' This means controlled private enterprise and the phased nationalisation of production, distribution, transport and trade. From the star features of oil, banks, timber and the rice trade, the take-over programme has expanded in many directions, including the export-import trade and chambers of commerce. The laws of March 1963 protected debt-ridden tenants. Two million landless farm hands are to be settled in co-operative colonies with a cottage and ten acres of ploughed land for each of 300 families to a colony. Each village cooperative is linked with the national agricultural bank and Marketing Board. Low-cost living, narrow income gaps and all-round development are the national targets.

INSURGENCY : This economic battle is being fought in an area sown with insurgency of a more conventional kind. There were friendly border talks with Thailand and, mercifully, no disputes with China. But Buddhists with tempers as fiery as their saffron robes constantly threaten the secular State. Tribal federalism is rampant, even after the dissolution of the five state councils. In a major reversal of policy, amnesty was granted in April 1963 to the three Communist parties and all the Kachins, Karens, Shans and Mons in sight. Last March an agreement with the moderates among the Karens provided for an autonomous State, to be named Kawthoolei, and Karen delegates to the local councils in three subdivisions. Talks with the Communists, however, broke down and they returned to their jungle hide-outs.

The process of softening up capitalist resistance and Burmanizing the professions has hit Indian residents where it hurts. It is a very real human problem. But the Burmese had to live too long with a growing alien community taking the cream off the economy. Fifty-eight per cent of the total foreign capital used to be Indian, the Indian banks controlled a large share of the rice mills, commercial houses and Government securities. The Chettiar tradition of lending money at high rates and then foreclosing the rice lands is best forgotten. It led to agrarian

revolts in the Tharawaddy district where the Indian exploiters were linked with the British. Some of us are never so happy as when slanting the rulers of Burma (and Ceylon, and East Africa) for their Indian policy. The sooner this pleasant exercise is suspended the better it will be for the Indians. Good-neighbour relations surely matter, even if historical truth does not.

Vol 1, No 15, January 29, 1965

## THANT'S UN

Since the most original idea to have emerged from the External Affairs Ministry after Lop Nor is that, functioning through the United Nations, India should dedicate herself to the task of preventing proliferation of nuclear arms, this country has a special need to have a closer look at the world organization, its viability which is inevitably related to its ability to do anything useful in the near future. Financially, it has long been on the verge of a breakdown from which it can be lifted, if at all, only by the big Powers; the USA can save it with still greater generosity, (though, according to the Russians, the USA is getting large monetary returns from the UN) Russia and France with less uncompromising stand, however legitimate, on peacekeeping operations in the Congo and elsewhere. India's is a watching brief, nothing spectacular or lavishly expensive.

There need be no public airing of the question immediately; but members distressed to see the UN's depleting finances may early have to ask themselves what the UN does and just how many dollars it is worth. With no disrespect to U Thant, the point can be made straightaway that the UN no longer has the authority it enjoyed under its first two Secretaries-General, especially under the late Mr Hammarskjöld. A number of international developments account for that diminution of prestige and stature; but some day even the unpleasant question may have to be raised whether the majority of the UN's vast staff is not grossly overpaid, that the scale of the world body's expenses and operations bear no relation whatever to what the majority of the members can afford. Like all else in life, the UN, simply to survive, may have to cut its coat according to the cloth there is.

What, for instance, is the size of India's permanent delegation at the UN? It is difficult to believe that there is none merely

deco-rative, hence redundant. When the delegation is swollen at the time there is a General Assembly session, is the inclusion of every new member justified? It is entirely right that India has so far supported the UN to the hilt (Kashmir is another matter). If the erosion of international confidence in the UN rises sharply, does India go on fighting for a noble but lost cause, or does she seek other tentative moorings as may be permissible under her general non-alignment? The automatic support extended by Mr Swaran Singh to a proposed Afro-Asian fund to help the UN out of its pre-sent financial morass suggests little fresh thinking in New Delhi.

Vol 1, No 16, February 5, 1965

### ICI PARIS

As usual, New Delhi missed the whole point of President de Gaulle's Press conference last week by silently sulking over the fact that Peking had scored a point in Paris; and this must have been more than usually mortifying because right at that moment the capital was also busy unfurling French flags to receive the French Prime Minister, the first ever to visit India. The story is told of an earlier French Premier who after a conducted tour of the seven old Delhis and their ruins and then of Lutyens's brave New Delhi, remarked, 'What lovely ruins these will one day make!' M Pompidou can be trusted to say no such indiscreet thing; and his Foreign Minister, M Couve de Murville, visiting Chandigarh, le Corbusier's proud child, may also examine the Indian polity today without undue inspiration from sights architectural.

It is impossible that General de Gaulle did not know how his proposal for a five-Power conference, with Peking participating, to correct the current imbalance of the United Nations would be received in New Delhi; American displeasure he must have taken for granted. Unpopular acts are not necessarily correct acts; and the general's lofty disdain for many objects of international reve-rence understandably irritate many. To accuse Paris of chauvinism has become commonplace in the Anglo-Saxon world, as though the Anglo-Saxons ever had much to learn from others in this depart-ment. A phenomenon less noticed is that some of these attitudes to France find ready and uncritical acceptance in what might be called the Indo-Saxon world of which the finest product perhaps is New Delhi's South Block, the head-quarters of the Ministry of External Affairs. It is devoutly to be hoped that a touch of the French flu such as MM Pompidou and de Murville may bring with them will impart to our thinking on foreign policy a little realism.

It should then be possible for New Delhi to see how futile the latest Quaison-Sackey plan to save the UN from bankruptcy is. It proposes an extensive tour of world capitals, both east and west, by an enormous delegation. There is nothing that this begging mission could not do by post from New York which it hopes to achieve by expensive tourism; and this is the kind of suggestion India should have opposed. The French have frequently been cussed in inter-national affairs; India, on the other hand, may have been a trifle too obliging to all parties at all times— with little earned for India. In 1940, at the moment of France's greatest humiliation, one man, de Gaulle, conducted himself with such dignity, almost arrogance, that the honour of France could be ignored by none. By comparison, India's setback in 1962 was as nothing. Our international behaviour since has not been marked even by a modicum of self-respect; and this is a far cry from the days when India's Mr Krishna Menon was being rude, often unwisely, to all and sundry at the slightest provocation. No return to rudeness is indicated; but injured passivity cannot be a country's foreign policy for all time to come. If Sardar Swaran Singh has made any difference to the External Affairs Ministry, the External Affairs Ministry has yet to know of it. Even when France's influence on world affairs was marginal, Paris was one of the best informed capitals in the world; New Delhi persists in the error that the best ingredients of a foreign policy are idealism and imagination.

Vol 1, No 17, February 12, 1965

## UNQUIET AMERICANS

About the only thing clear in the news from Saigon is that Saigon is not the point at all. In Moscow over the weekend Mr George Thom-son was waiting to meet Mr Gromyko; Mr Mao Tse-tung assured the world through a German newspaper that China had no intention to fight anyone; Mr Kosygin assured all help to North Vietnam if American mischief continued, but the statement had the ring of a routine utterance. Washington's Mr Bundy promised the end of strikes against Hanoi and many will be wondering who does what and to whom in South Vietnam. (Mr Shastri and M Pompidou appeared to say that a neutralized Vietnam was a good idea but India's suggestion of a summit has already been sat upon in more world capitals than one, while General de Gaulle's grand design of a French role in Asia has yet to unfold itself. The design may not be sinister at all.)

There has been more than one indication that the writ of Washing-ton does not run in Saigon, where there are other US agencies at work. Appreciation in some quarters of the US President's so-called difficulties is limited by the incontrovertible fact that he is not averse to making domestic political capital out of a dangerous show of strength in distant Vietnam. Perhaps the Americans need a training ground in guerrilla warfare for GIs, even as the British had their NWFP; but, surely, the USA is big enough to provide a Nevada for non-nuclear tests also. Winston Churchill once called World War II 'The Unnecessary War'; that in Vietnam seems The Senseless War, except as an answer to the spectre that haunted the Rev Mr Malthus. A decade should be enough to teach the Americans when to play it cool and prepare to pull out.

Vol 1, No 18, February 19, 1965