

Weekly Notes

Dr B C Roy

Our Calcutta Correspondent writes : ALTHOUGH Dr Roy had been ailing for a week, his death on July 1 came as a shock, made the more poignant by coinciding with his 81st birthday. Only on Friday he had presided over a Cabinet meeting; on Saturday he was still busy with State papers and was summoning officials and colleagues for discussions. On Sunday morning he was dissuaded with difficulty from meeting some of those who had come to convey birthday felicitations.

The milling crowds outside his Wellington Street residence on Sunday afternoon were indicative of the regard in which Dr Roy was held, even by those who frequently disagreed with him. As the Communist Party daily, *Swadhinata*, noted in an editorial, he had the sense of realism to rise above narrow party considerations to reach a compromise with political opponents when the State's interests so required.

Whatever might be the assessment of Dr Roy's role in the post-Independence history of West Bengal, no one can deny that he was one of the most forceful personalities in the country's political life. This was, in no small measure, a reflection of the eminence he had attained outside politics as an outstanding physician, an able administrator and an educationist. Partly it had also something to do with his age — he was, for instance, a friend of Pandit Motilal Nehru and was not beyond treating Jawahar in an avuncular fashion. There were remarkably few people in West Bengal whom he did not address with the familiar "thou".

Apart from his undoubted intellectual attainments, his self-confidence was buttressed by his remarkable, and almost legendary stamina. For years he slept no more than three or four hours, with the rest of the long waking day taken up by a consuming passion for work. His long hours at the Secretariat — he was there from 9 a m to 6 p m every day with only a short lunch break — must have been a trial to men much younger,

His towering build, his loud and resonant voice, his firm gait and sure

grasp all conveyed a sense of power. Forthright and outspoken, sometimes uncomfortably so, Dr Roy remained to the very last a force to be reckoned with.

West Bengal Congress, like the party in any other State today, has its warring factions — the two major ones being headed by P G Sen, the senior-most Cabinet Minister who is also the Legislative Party's Deputy Leader, and by Atulya Ghosh, the P C C President. Higher political ambitions have undoubtedly stirred in their breasts but Dr Roy's stature ruled out altogether any overt bid. Atulya Ghosh made an attempt to enter the Assembly in the 1962 election but was firmly excluded by the High Command and told to take himself to the Lok Sabha, a straight fight between Sen and Ghosh is now quite on the cards though the situation is a little complicated by Union Law Minister Asoke Sens reported keenness to come back to tie-State and make a separate bid for the West Bengal *gaddi*. Asoke Sen has no great party following but his strength lies in the backing he may be able to get from the High Command which is conscious of the need to find once again a good administrator to guide this troubled State.

As long as Dr Roy lived, no tact in the party had much of a chance — his imperious will prevailed in all matters. Hence, his ability to take an unpopular stand when he thought such a step was necessary. At the height of the agitation over the States' reorganisation, he and the late Dr Srikrishna Sinha, another father-figure who presided over Bihar's destinies, mooted a proposal for the merger of the two States — an impractical suggestion, but one that had a certain grandeur, recalling Churchill's plea for an Anglo-French union on the eve of France's collapse in World War II.

Dr Roy is no more. Uppermost in many minds now is the thought that no other leader will be able to press Bengal's case with the Centre with the force that Dr Roy could. This assumes of course that such pressure is, and will continue to be, necessary. Whatever the validity of this premise, a weak leadership will aggravate the sense of frustration

and bitterness, not surprising in a State where population pressure, aggravated by refugee influx, has brought the economy to a breaking point. Bitterness may generate tensions within the State, particularly in the multi-lingual metropolis of Calcutta retarding a solution to its grave problems.

These were the problems that preoccupied Dr Roy more than anything else during the last months of his life. Around his sick bed, three days before he was struck down, he had held a Conference with Dr Douglas Ensminger of the Ford Foundation on its work under the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation. It is impossible to conceive of a plan to rehabilitate Calcutta which does not involve a head-on flash with vested interests — a task now made immeasurably more difficult by the passing away of Dr Roy.

Dr Radhakrishnan, who counted Dr Roy as a personal friend of over 10 years standing, appropriately said that his death had left West Bengal "desolate". Such sentiments are no more than customary on an occasion like this, but in this case this corresponds closely to the truth of the Bengali situation.

Independent Algeria

EIGHT years of sacrifice have borne fruit and Algeria is again free after more than a century of French colonial rule. The Algerian struggle for independence has more than one claim to being called epic. Not only have the losses and sufferings the Algerians have undergone in it been colossal, the fight, has fashioned a nation out of tribes that never before in history could unite against a common foe. They now have a history, their myths, their songs and their legendary heroes; they are a nation today as good as any; they are masters of their destiny. Good enough reasons for the wild scenes of rejoicing witnessed in Algeria.

Things there seem to be working at high pressure. The Algerian National Liberation Front that led the people to victory and has long foiled French attempts to divide it had been showing signs of cracks even before the country became

free. Not that the Front could hope ever to remain united. Sooner or later it was bound to divide itself into various units. A front is by definition a unity of diverse elements each of which, with the attainment of the common objective, is expected to go its way. Hut in Algeria this process may set in much earlier than was expected till now. It looks as though the differences between Mr Mohammed Hen Bella and some of the leaders of the partisan army on the one hand and the rest of the Provisional Government on the other are growing into something more than the divisions between the extremists and moderates of a movement that is last transforming itself into a party. As this transformation gathers speed so will the differences grow and ultimately the different wings will no longer be held together. How soon this will happen or whether this is already a fact, it is difficult to say. This much is certain that things are moving fast, even for Algeria.

She may with difficulty withstand a peaceful separation of the two wings of the Provisional Government. But a civil war among the nationalists now can only mean disaster. The tasks before the Government are stupendous: Half a million refugees and nearly two million "regrouped" people to be returned to some kind of normal existence; the repair of the ravages of the war and of the Secret Army; and, on top of this, the long-term development of the country. Assimilation of the *colons* poses yet another problem that will tax a good deal of the resources of the Government.

If the schism between the "hards" and the "softs" stem at least partly from differences over the methods of repair and recreation and the Evian agreements which, to some extent, govern them, the immensity of the tasks ahead may act as a unifying force. The rival protagonists are mature people ripe in wisdom, if not in years: they are likely to think, not once or twice hut many times, before they really and finally make up their minds to part. And other Arab countries will do their best to smooth matters for the two wings to work together.

Central Loans

THE three new General Government loans aggregating Rs 250 crores announced this week will complete the borrowing programme of the Centre for this year as provided in the Budget. Last year the programme was completed in two instalments, hut easier money condition-, during the current slack season have made a single sweep operation possible. That, however, is not the main feature of the new loans. It is their maturity and yield which deserve notice. Of the three loans, one is repayable in 1968 and carries interest at 3¾ per cent. the second in 1972 at 1 per cent and the third in 1985 at 4½ per cent. The first two are offered at a small discount while the third is at par. The rates of interest are appreciably higher than the yields

on comparable securities, particularly in the case of the 1985 issue. The gross redemption yields on the first two issues are 3.9 and 4.10 per cent against 3.78 and 3.98 per cent respectively on past issues maturing at the same time. No loan in the existing series matures in 1985 but the 4 per cent 1981 loan offers a yield of 4.08 per cent only against 4½ per cent on the new 1985 issue.

The issue of a 23-year loan after a long time is very welcome. At present one-third of the combined debt of Central and State Governments is due to mature within 5 years, and another one-third in 5 to 10 years. Apart from the conversion loan payable in 1980 or later, there is practically no Government paper of more than 20 years maturity in the market. This is the re-