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Comrades No More

ARTHUR Koestler was wrong: the ultimate battle will not be between the communists and the ex-communists. From the way things are going it now seems that in that final of all confrontations, the backdrop will be severely intra-mural — it will in fact be the communists who will be fighting the other communists; and there could be no nastier battle.

From all angles it is a sorry spectacle. Developments over the last few days indicate that the split in the Communist Party of India is almost inevitable. Holding press conferences to run down one's comrades, accusations and counter-accusations, prompt repudiation of pronouncements made by some leaders by other ones, add up to a sickening array of distasteful events. Clearly, whether or not the formal split comes at next week's meeting of the National Council, CPI has already ceased to function as an organised political entity. And yet this is the party which till the other day was known for its iron cohesion and rigorous internal discipline.

There is no question that the break-up of the CPI would grievously affect the growth of the Indian polity, and is to be regretted on that score alone. The PSP has all but withered away, while Dr Lohia's Socialists are too often given to aberration to be seriously considered as a category of the Left. With the Swatantra Party and the Jan Sangh crying hoopla on the Right, the balance of political forces in the country all of a sudden seems dangerously tilted in one direction. Given the reality that even within the Congress the conservative elements far outweigh those with overt socialist convictions, one can hardly dispute the need for a strong and stable party of the Left. A political democracy, after all, can survive and progress *via* the dialectics of balancing tensions. If the CPI cannot be cured of its *schadenfreude* no recognizable force will remain on the Left to challenge the propositions of the Right. Such an imbalance, for all one knows, might lead to a chain of unwholesome consequences. Neither the Jan Sangh nor the Swatantra Party can be fitted into a theme of progress: the Sangh's political doctrines are quasi-fascist, while the Swatantra Party's economic pronouncements are altogether innocent of the twentieth century context. The country's economic future as well as political integrity would be seriously compromised if the only challenger the Congress is exposed to were represented by these two parties.

Not that literacy has been the CPI's strong point either; it has had its own variant of obscurantism and jejune theology. But in the existing political situation in the country, the virtue of the CPI's theology lies in its polarity from the Swatantra and Jan Sangh points of view. Besides, till now the party has been able to command the allegiance of a band of dedicated individuals who have suffered a great deal in the cause of the country's freedom, and have worked with immense devotion to organise the peasantry and the working class. The specific role the CPI decided to adopt during the Second World War still raises controversy, but that cannot really obscure the fact that many amongst the heroes of the 1942 struggle are now in the

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