

More Loyal Than the King

THE All-India Radio is not exactly unused to criticism. Apart from general inefficiency and the quality of programmes, it has been taken to task, often enough and very deservedly, for acting as the mouthpiece of the government and suppressing or playing down news and views unfavourable to the government. It must have been a new experience for the AIR, therefore, to be put on the mat in Parliament for permitting a speaker in one of its programmes to question statistics put out by the Government.

On Monday the Minister for Information and Broadcasting had to face what newspaper reports described as "a barrage of angry questions" in the Lok Sabha over a recent broadcast in which a speaker had expressed the opinion that the losses suffered by India in the righting with Pakistan appeared to be much higher than the official estimates. Some of the more zealous members of the Congress Party one may have expected to pounce on the AIR for this; in fact, however, it was not they but "several opposition members" who took exception to the broadcast and criticised the Minister for allowing such a statement to be made on the radio. Hiren Mukerjee, the leader of the Right communists, characterised the AIR's lapse as "dangerous and mischievous"!

This was strange behaviour indeed for members of the opposition in Parliament. Have they come to accept that the proper function of the AIR is just to disseminate government publicity? This they will stoutly deny, of course, maintaining that their stand in this particular case is dictated by the fact that the matter concerns the war with Pakistan which is, after all, a grave national issue. True, the war with Pakistan is a grave national issue, but so is the food situation, even more grave perhaps. For that reason is no one to be allowed to say over the radio that perhaps the Government is painting an over-optimistic picture of the food prospects in the coming months? If it is possible to present facts of food production and supply in a manner as to show the Government in a more creditable light than it deserves, the same is theoretically perfectly possible with statistics relating to war.

In fact, it is accepted practice in a war to play down one's losses and play up those of the enemy — as much

because of considerations of the enemy's morale as because of any government's natural anxiety to convince its people that it is doing well and so deserves their continued support. In the last world war, for instance, the contemporary German and Allied accounts of the various battles couldn't well have been both true. Or, take again, the claims of the Americans and the South Vietnamese Government and the Viet Cong about the Vietnam civil war. Of course, it is possible that the Government of India is either too innocent or too truthful to take recourse to this accepted practice, but the point is, how do Hiren Mukerjee and the other members of the opposition who jumped to the defence of Government statistics of losses in the war know?

The AIR, everyone knows, is far from impartial even in its presentation of news, not to talk of its comments, and, surely, members of the opposition don't have to waste their spleen at rare, accidental departures

from these standards? The incident in the Lok Sabha, however, does not come entirely as a surprise considering that the opposition, with the exception of a few members of the Left Communist and Swatantra parties, has delivered itself bound hands and feet to the Government over the Indo-Pak war and the Kashmir question. In having done this the opposition parties may pat themselves on their patriotism but they are in fact making it easy for the Government to make glaring departures from the ways of a democratic society. Such departures have painfully multiplied since the state of Emergency was first proclaimed after the Chinese attack three years ago to give the Congress Government powers to put such of its actions as it wishes beyond the pale of judicial review. The fight with Pakistan has strengthened the trend, thanks both to clever exploitation of the situation by the Government and the Congress Party and the political ineptitude and irresponsibility of the opposition of which the "barrage of angry questions" on Monday was an excellent example.

What Next on Kashmir?

THE charge levelled by some members of the opposition in the foreign affairs debate in the Lok Sabha that in the war with Pakistan India had found herself friendless was as exaggerated as the Foreign Minister's attempt to meet it by making a list of countries like Cyprus, Singapore, Ethiopia and Czechoslovakia was irrelevant. Such arithmetic exercises are immaterial to the question what will be our next move on Kashmir. We may tell ourselves, as we have been interminably, that the Kashmir issue does not exist since it was settled eighteen years ago, but that is not the end of the matter. For one thing, there is the two-months old invitation from the Soviet Prime Minister to Shastri and Ayub Khan to meet for talks in Tashkent. Also, there is the prospect, ever so little brighter now, that sometime or the other the first two parts of the Security Council's resolution of September 20 may be implemented, bringing India, Pakistan and the world to face the resolution's call to "consider... what steps can be taken to assist towards a settlement of the political problem underlying the present conflict".

What to do when the last part of the Security Council's resolution is reached has not apparently begun to seriously engage the attention of the Govern-

ment yet. Though Shastri did say during the Lok Sabha debate that India was prepared to consider ceasefire and withdrawal "more or less simultaneously", no doubt the expectation is that it will be a long time before "steps... to assist towards a settlement of the political problem" will begin to be pressed on India, particularly in view of the ticklish problem of bringing the infiltrators inside Kashmir within the scope of any arrangement for withdrawal of the rival forces.

The Soviet invitation, however, has to be answered, especially since Ayub Khan has accepted it "unconditionally". The Prime Minister was, however, less than forthright on this matter, judging by newspaper reports of his speech in the absence of the full text. According to these reports, he ruled out any meeting with Ayub Khan if the subject of discussion was to be Kashmir since such a meeting could "never bear fruit". At the same time, however, he was prepared to accept the Soviet invitation to discuss ways to improve the "total relationship" between India and Pakistan. Now, it is plain enough that the Soviet Union has not taken the important diplomatic initiative of inviting the Prime Minister of India and the President of Pakistan at this critical moment to discuss the weather. Prime