

Weekly Notes

Negotiations on Naga Issue

ANOTHER, and seemingly a more promising, effort is now being made in Delhi to settle the Naga problem. A delegation from the Naga People's Convention, an organisation largely of moderate opinion, has been holding discussions with Ministers and senior officials on the 10-point representation made by the Convention. The main point of the representation is that the Nagas must have an autonomous State of their own, to be called the Nagaland, with a legislative assembly and Council of Ministers. The State is to be a part of the Indian Union, functioning under the Republican Constitution.

The extraneous forces, which found ready supporters among certain sections of the Nagas for their policies of disruption, have evidently lost much of their hold. And in a sense, Phizo's flight might be said to mark the end of a phase which saw considerable turmoil and also created for some time that illusion of possible success which fed the unrest. That Phizo should have chosen the time of the visit to New Delhi of the moderate Naga leaders for stepping up his propaganda offensive against India in London would seem to show that he and others of his way of thinking are engaged in a final bid to prevent a settlement which will mean the end of their profitable game.

That is all the more reason why the present opportunity should not be lost by the negotiating parties to come to an early settlement, at least in principle if not in the fulness of detail. The measures taken by the Government of India so far, though fairly successful in restoring order and a measure of security in the Naga areas and also paving the way for reasonable progress, have not done much to give emotional satisfaction to the tribal people. The old sense of frustration, whether justified or not, and the feeling of not being allowed to grow to the full height of their traditional individuality and pride, however groundlessly entertained, continue; and it does no good to this country to allow such discontent to persist in a strategically important territory, particularly now when new perils threaten our frontiers.

For a nation that has accepted the principle of linguistic autonomy in a large measure, the possible hazards of such a policy notwithstanding, there should be little cause for hesitation in accepting the substance of the new Naga demand for autonomy within the Indian Union. How it is to be brought about, in what stages and over what period are, however, matters that necessarily call for careful consideration. Some aspects of the Naga representation or of the notions accompanying it such as the idea of having a separate constitution for the State or of including a Minister for Foreign Affairs in the cabinet of the proposed new State, though possibly presented as bargaining counters, are certainly not helpful. But if the Nagas genuinely desire to consider themselves as a part of the Indian nation, contributing in their own way to its variety of tradition, culture, way of life and management of affairs, they would be serving themselves and the rest of their countrymen better by laying emphasis on spontaneous closeness rather than on stubborn isolation.

Peer at Foreign Office

MR MACMILLAN has had little difficulty in getting the House of Commons to endorse his choice of Lord Home as the foreign Secretary — the application of a firm party whip easily took care of that part of the issue. The larger one remains, however. Critics in the Commons (and they are not all Opposition members) have voiced no personal objection to the appointment of Lord Home: their objection is to the very principle of a member of the House of Lords occupying so vital a position as that of Foreign Secretary and being, therefore, not available to the Commons for debate.

Strictly speaking, there is no convention or principle involved. Lord Home is certainly not the first member of the House of Lords to become Foreign Secretary. But the Labour party's position is that if no convention existed in the past, it should be initiated now. This stand has a clear justification. It seems quite wrong that a person who is not answerable to the Commons (and therefore to the electo-

rate) should head the Foreign Office. But does it mean, as Mr Macmillan pointed out during the debate on Labour's censure motion on Thursday night, that a British citizen should never aspire to high office in the Cabinet merely because of the accident of birth?

The final answer to that question is an answer which must at the same time meet the legitimate objections raised by the Labour party — will come only when a Lord is permitted to become a Commoner: by renouncing his peerage.

Distribution of Russian Oil

THOUGH a few more particulars are now known about the import of oil products from Russia, no information is as yet available on the price at which they will be sold. This reticence to disclose the price is understandable since Government has found Russian oil a useful bargaining counter for inducing foreign oil companies to reduce their price by a larger margin than agreed to by them earlier. Burmah-Shell, the leading supplier, has already advanced its offer of a price cut from 7 1/2 per cent to about 12 per cent. The other two will have to follow suit. Since this further cut has been announced after discussions with Government, it may be the last during the current fiscal year. The next round may, therefore, come only after March next year, when a new price and cost formula will be introduced on the recommendation of the recently-appointed Damle Committee. The price cuts will no doubt save some foreign exchange but the oil companies are hardly likely to accept payment in rupees like the Russians. Unless they agree to do so wholly or partially, they will remain under constant pressure to effect price cuts.

Indian Oil Limited, the Government company, which will distribute Russian oil has no intention of importing any crude. Its function will be confined to selling the output of the two Government refineries which would amount to 2.75 million tons when they reach full capacity, and also selling the refined products that they may be imported on Government account which are not expected to exceed about 0.75 million tons. Imports over the next 3 1/2 years