

# 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