The overwhelming influence of the party system on the functioning of all political institutions in the country has been stressed in this series. The consummation of the substantive political process in the two networks of party and administration and their mutual interaction were the theme of the last instalment.

The analysis is carried further below by focussing attention on the working of the party system itself. It will be shown that the system as it has developed is in many ways unique and without parallel in other countries.

The Constitution and the electoral system point to a development of the party system along conventional lines; in practice, its development has been along different lines and in the process, it has affected the working of the Constitution itself.

The influence of the party system in politics is largely a result of our historical development. In many Asian countries, political institutions have developed under quite different auspices under an administrative bureaucracy or a military elite. In India, the movement for national independence was allowed to be openly organised by the British; second, and this is very important, it was spread over a period; thus there was enough time to build up a well-designed organisational network; third, the need was felt quite early to give the movement a mass basis through a "microscopic minority" of Swarajists into a nationwide organisation. Max Weber's "stages" of party development from aristocratic cliques to parties of notables and finally to mass parties do not apply to the Indian case where almost from the beginning the party had to be consciously organised and given a popular basis at a later stage. The Indian National Congress had emerged as a highly organised party long before Independence, achieving what Sir Ivor Jennings has called "organisation in depth". India was, therefore, in a very fortunate position when Independence came. The leadership of the "movement" took over the government of the country and sustained it at all levels. Along with the administrative hierarchy inherited from the British, this made for political stability, avoided political disintegration and ruled out any possibility of the military taking over.

The "organisation in depth" of the Congress party also ensured that its authority would not be seriously challenged. While acute differences with the official line often developed within the Congress, the dissenting members could either try to influence the party from within or leave the party and go into wilderness. Attempts at bringing about an open split have been frustrated and although each break has meant the withdrawal of some very capable men from the Congress, thus weakening the party, the dissidents have lacked the political support that could make for an effective opposition.

Eclecticism of the Congress

This was so before Independence; it has been even more so since. The position is similar to that in Britain and America where the formation of a new party is an almost impossible task, except that in India the dissidents from the Congress do not have the alternative of joining another equally well-organised party. Besides, differences within the Congress did not always mean a complete and decisive breaking away of the dissidents from the party. Thus, when the Socialists in the Congress differed from the party's official leadership, there was considerable difference of opinion among the socialists, one group advocating a complete break and the other pleading for changing the Congress from within. The argument has continued ever since between those in the Socialist party (now the P S P) who have, sought "co-operation" with the Congress, and those who have advocated socialist militancy, in the process further splitting the socialist opposition (for example, the breaking away of the Lohia Group from the P S P). The only major merger among opposition groups (between the Socialist party and the KMP) made for a dilution of the socialist platform and turned the P S P into a feeble replica of the Congress, which could provide no real alternative to the ruling party. On the other hand, the decision of the Kidwai Group to continue within the Congress strengthened the hands of the Prime Minister against the rightists in the Congress.

Many of the weaknesses of the Congress party arise from its eclecticism; so does its strength. The Congress has shown a flexibility in its political programmes which has defeated all attempts at providing real alternative to it. By adopting the socialistic pattern resolution, it stole the thunder from the P S P; by modifying its agrarian policy in practice, it prevented the Swatantra party from mobilising the land-owning classes against it. Even the Communists are forced to choose between "cooperating with Nehru " or going all-out against the parliamentary system. In this latter sense what the Communist party offers is an alternative to the present political system. rather than to the ruling party, the Amritsar thesis notwithstanding. The Congress party (as well as some opposition parties) treats the Communist party as alien to the existing political order and is in no way reconciled to its parliamentary status: the Kerala experience demonstrated this beyond all doubt. The understanding between the parties, which is necessary for the C P I to function as a parliamentary opposition, just does not exist.

Political developments in the Western world have led to the class.
fication of political systems into one-party systems (used widely to describe the dictatorships) and multi-party systems; the latter brine further divided into the pos-part) systems and systems where there are more than two parties. Complementary to this broad classification is the distinction made on the Continent between the party of action and the party of platform depending upon the degree of proximity to power. There is also the distinction between the party of programme and the party of personages, broadly approximating to the distinction between institutional and personal government. Finally, theorising about the British system has led to a division between the conservative party and the progressive party.

How to Classify the Congress?

None of these classifications is completely relevant to the Indian situation. Although the opposition parties are remote from the exercise of authority, thus making for much preoccupation with ideological issues, the Congress party is also preoccupied with such issues to a marked degree, largely because of frustration with action programmes. Similarly, the Congress party claims to be as "progressive" as most of the opposition parties. Again, the dominance of personalities and the lack of institutional leadership is evident in a more or less equal dearer in all Indian parties. The more general classification into one-party and multi-party systems also loses much of its meaning when applied to India. The fact is that we have neither a one-party system which assumes not only the absence but also the illegality of other parties nor a multi-party system which assumes that no party is sufficiently powerful to form the government by itself. Nor is it a 'multi-party system in theory but a one-party system in practice' as it is often described. Attempts to fit facts into a preconceived pattern are misleading as they fail to take into account the most important facts about the Indian situation. The party system as it has emerged is unique and should be analysed in terms of itself. Most important for this analysis is to understand the relationship between the Congress and the opposition parties. We must, therefore, start with the latter.

The role of opposition parties in India is quite distinctive. Instead of providing an alternative to the Congress party, they function by influencing sections within the Congress. They oppose by making Congressmen oppose. Groups within the ruling party assume the role of opposition parties, often quite openly, reflecting the ideologies and interests of the other parties. The latter influence political decision-making at the margin. Criticism from the platform or in the legislature has often found response among Congressmen and been echoed in the deliberations of the party. The political stature of an opposition leader and his personal relations with the high-ups in the Congress have often given him an influence with the Congress which has prevented frustration and bitterness which would otherwise result from his party being in a position of permanent minority. This also explains why there is such a wide gap between the leadership and the rank and file of the opposition parties and partly accounts for the lack of unity among these parties.

Opposition Fragmented

The fragmentation of opposition parties has baffled observers. It has been observed that in a social order which is in the process of disruption, militant political parties provide a sense of belonging to the educated youth, who are also more often than not unemployed. This is true to some extent and accounts for the anxiety of the rank and file of opposition parties to maintain the separate identities of their respective parties. The importance of this factor should not, however, be overstressed. For it is also true that political parties in India have failed to inspire young men who are turning increasingly indifferent to politics. Their ranks are being slowly depleted and the opposition parties are becoming lop-sided with personal rivalry among leaders. The reasons for fragmentation have, therefore, to be sought in other factors.

One reason which has already been mentioned is the position of the Congress and its front-rank leadership in Indian politics. The impression has, therefore, gained ground that only if the Congress breaks up is there any chance for any other party to come up. Rampant factionalism within the Congress has given the opposition hope that such a break up is in the offing. Meanwhile, duly by entering into some arrangement with the ruling party can the opposition parties taste power. This is possible in States where the Congress does not have an absolute majority in the state legislatures.

Reasons for Divisions

This points to another and a more important reason for the continuing divisions within the opposition. The fact that no single party has been able to challenge the Congress led each party think that it is more capable than the others to eventually replace the Congress and that the others should therefore merge themselves. This attitude in turn ensures that no party can really replace Congress. Meanwhile, individual politicians contest the elections to get themselves elected, not to put their party in power. This has led to lack of concern for building up the party; it has also made for the absence of a common outlook among the members of the party in different parts of the country. Instances where regional units of these parties have flirted their national leadership are not lacking. The P S P for instance, was forced to change its stand three times in two years on the question of coalitions with other parties, and in the end had to approve rather than condemn deviations from the official line in the States. While discipline among the rank and file is stressed with almost totalitarian thoroughness, disunity among the leadership has become endemic. Disunity among opposition parties is reinforced by disunity within each party and the result is to reduce politics to a sort of personal sport for individual politicians. (The Communist Party, however, prevents a marked contrast with other opposition groups in all these respects but the Congress is determined to prevent it from coming to power. In this, the Congress can confidently count on the support of other opposition parties.)

Opposition to the ruling party does not take the usually expected form. It takes quite different forms in this country. There is much irresponsibly criticism, a chronic
habit of complaining and shifting all blame to the Government, sporadic campaigns of personal vilification and an inclination to wash dirty linen in public. The monopolistic position of the Congress, the unorganised and fragmentary nature of the opposition which cannot even adequately ventilate popular grievances, and the atmosphere of corruption and jobbery have given rise to a negative attitude among the general public. It goes further: antipathy to the ruling group turns into antipathy to politics itself. Politics is not for good men and it is only for opportunists and careerists. Such reactions are common among the middle class and more so among the intellectuals. The net result is that organised opposition is discouraged and centralisation of power continues unchecked. This is aggravated by opposition politicians who, frustrated with the existing situation, plead for en-operation with the ruling group, in effect refusing to oppose. The "compulsions of a backward economy" thesis is a rationalisation born out of a basic weakness of the opposition. Here too, the Communist Party's strategy is very different. It waits for a general exasperation with the party system that would give it its real chance. Such exasperation is already noticeable among important sections of the people, and is often expressed by men who are till yesterday outstanding politicians. The fanciful plea for "unanimous elections" is another indication of the anti-party bias in recent political thinking. Such an ideology, shared as it is by part of the opposition, means that the latter is withdrawing from political struggle in precisely those areas, such as local government where if has most chances of success. All this adds to the confused and fragmentary state of political opposition in the country. The net result is that the only alternatives with which the country is left are the continuing exercise of power by the Congress which works through an internalised opposition system but which, if continued for long and under the leadership of less scrupulous leaders, would turn totalitarian; and the Communist rise to power which would bring an end to the party system itself. It is an impossible choice.

Today almost the whole of the political process is taking place within the folds of the Congress. The Congress is more than a party; it constitutes an entire party system. The conflicts and alignments within the Congress are of greater political import, than its conflict with the opposition groups. The operative political categories in India are factions within the ruling party, organised on different lines and interacting in a continuous process of pressure, adjustment and accommodation. The true opposition that emerges is not against but within the Congress. In this, the opposition parties themselves play their part at the margin as indicated above.

The Political Process

This also means that a large part of political conflict and competition for power take place before and after rather than during the general elections. Before, in the selection of candidates and the regional and group pressures that affect such selection and after, in the formation of ministries and the dispensation of patronage. Also in cases where the Congress has not returned with an absolute majority in the legislature, the real process starts after the elections. Attempts are made to obstruct other parties from assuming or continuing in power for long by mustering the strength of the Congress from all sides, by invoking interference from the High Command or the Central Government, by coalitions and united fronts and by the holding of new elections under more favourable circumstances. What the elections (and re-elections) do is to endow such a process with legal sanction. The elections are very important on other counts also. They provide a channel of participation to the general public thus legitimising authority, force the ruling party to make bargains with organised interests, and generally spread political consciousness among the electorate.

The upshot of the above analysis is that the working of factions within the Congress provide the substantive context of the political process that goes on in this country. Further, it is at the level of factions that the true nature of the Congress and its distinctiveness from other parties is also revealed. For it is at this level that one can see how close the Congress is to society: it reflects all the major social divisions and interests. It is also at this level that the traditional institutions find entry into the political process. The factions have their own structure and lines of communication and constitute an intricate system of decision-making. They give rise to forms of political behaviour that cut across the formally established institutions and provide a clue to the otherwise baffling twists and turns of Indian political life, they can, with some intensive study, be as precisely located as the more formal institutions? Broad and tentative observations can here be advanced.

The faction system (factionalism is an emotive term and has no place in an analysis of institutions) works at all levels of the Congress organisation. Generally, however, the lower down we go, the more pervasive the system becomes in conditioning the political process. It is also found in more unalloyed forms nearer the base. Once we leave the rarefied atmosphere of parliament and administration and the Working Committee and go down, say, to the Mandal Committee level, we see that the whole picture changes. The issues differ: the understanding of politics differs: the norms differ; and although the formal procedures bear resemblance to those found in the higher levels, the actual process of arriving at decisions differs. There is much that the purist would find deplorable at this level but it should not be forgotten that what happens here determines to a large extent the tenor of Indian political life.

At the Lower Level

Factions at the local level are based on caste, kinship and personal loyalties; the last being the most important. Dominant personalities provide the tallying points of opposing factions. As factional loyalties are, however, based on expediency and are thus inherently unstable, kin and caste ties are brought into play to impart stability to personal followings. These are then reinforced by the dispensation of patronage and the personality of the leader. The result is clear divisions of the party that are openly avowed and that give rise to constant conflicts and adjustments. Of course, the factions
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Mandal-level factions are, however, with groups within the District and the Pradesh Congress. It is a two-way traffic. Good connections with important persons or groups in the Pradesh Congress or the State Government strengthen the hands of particular leaders and the factions they lead at the lower level. Equally, a strong and dynamic leader with a large following in the district carries great weight at the State level. The system of communications between factions at different levels is important and although politicians from above often come to "settle" disputes at the lower level, such attempts are usually soon abandoned, largely because the State politicians are themselves indirect parties to the faction system. In fact, quite often the conciliatory move from above comes at the behest of local politicians in conflict with the ruling group.

To complete the picture, it must be mentioned that the strength of State politicians and their groups depends to a large extent on the weight they carry with the High Command and the Union Government. The process is similar as between the district and the State, except that it is of much greater political import and substantially affects the incidence of political mortality in the States.

Organisational and Governmental Wings

The hierarchy of factions outlined above does not exhaust the group process within the Congress. While it is very important for maintaining both the unity and the efficiency of the party, the most important dimension of the faction system is found at the State and national levels. The two-party system that is really emerging in India is made up of the Congress government in power and the organisational wing of the party. The opposition parties marginally influence this struggle; so does the factional hierarchy discussed above. On the other hand, this struggle is largely independent and has its own dynamics, very often affecting the fortunes of politicians at other levels and in other parties.

A marked shift has been noticeable of late in this struggle. The organisational wing of the Congress, till recently dominated by those in the government, has begun to assert its independence quite openly. Those in charge of the organisation constitute a rival faction to those running the government. They use various techniques of competition, traditionally associated with the opposition party. They make representations on behalf of aggrieved interests; they make legislative members make use of the question hour in criticising the government; they even utilise the press to publicise their dissatisfaction with the government; above all, they seek to win a majority in the legislature on their behalf and if the governing group feels it must have its own way, they are prepared to replace it as an alternative government. They use other means also. Motions are passed in Pradesh Congress meetings; representations to the High Command are made and mediation called for; very active canvassing is carried out for elections to the A.I.C.C, the Pradesh Election Committee, the Central Election Committee and the Working Committee.

The organisational wing has been building up its strength by giving greater importance to the affiliated agencies of the Congress like the Seva Dal, the Youth Congress and the Mahila Congress, but even more, by making political use of these agencies. This is a comparatively recent phenomenon. These agencies recruit new and young men who add strength to the Congress organisation and nurse the ideology that field work is more important than the governmental work; the trend of reducing the ministerial VIPs to their proper size was clearly in evidence at the Sardarnagar Session.

Faction System in the Wings

All this does not mean that either the organisational or the governmental wing is united against the other; the faction system enters the Congress organisation and mediates in village disputes and helps settle them, in the process building up its own support in the localities. The linkage is often direct and roundabout but it is nonetheless present.

The really important links of the
play the same trend, the Youth Congress runs as a parallel organisation to the Seva Dal in many of its functions and constitutes a rival force. Leaders of the Youth Congress and the Manila Congress are known to build up "connections" with important persons in the party, extending thereby the faction system into these agencies. Thus almost every Congressman belongs to one faction or another; the faction system runs through the entire working of the party and constitutes the substantive party system in Indian politics.12

Alongside the directly affiliated agencies, there are a number of organised interest groups close to the Congress that are able to influence the organisational wing and through it the government. The strength of the Indian National Trade Union Congress as a pressure group, for example, is well-known. There are similar other organisations of students, women, peasants and the professions which are either run by Congressmen or which enter into informal relationships with the Congress. They are also a part of the faction system and exert substantial pressure on the organisation.

Factions Have a Role

The unqualified condemnation of "factionalism" within the Congress by national leaders is often based on an unrealistic appreciation of the political process. It is forgotten that factions have role to play at the present level of our political development. They prevent the rise of a monolithic state by providing a built-in opposition within the ruling party. In the absence of effective opposition from outside, they prevent excessive concentration of power. Within the party, too, they make for intimate relationships thus modifying the operation of the law of oligarchy found in all organised parties.10 They make for constant interaction between opposing interests and necessitate the adjustments so vital to the democratic process. They accommodate all the important sections of society, albeit in an unequal manner. They lend flexibility to the political process and enable governmental changes to occur without a purge. While they have obstructed the growth of the vital convention of tolerating opposition parties in power when public opinion demands it and has kept the country unprepared for a change in administration, it has prevented the Congress monopoly from becoming totalitarian. On the whole it has made "politics by discussion" both possible and necessary.

On the other hand, factions, if not restricted, can prove dangerous, and lead to instability and intrigues. More important is the danger to the country's unity. It is true that genuine political unity assumes political divisions, but when the emphasis on divisions outstrips the concern for unity, the result is disintegration of the political community. But the worst consequence of factions, one that is inherent in it, is the exaggerated emphasis placed on personalities. The result is exercise of authority based on individual caprices in place of institutions and programmes. "Charismatic" authority is more suited to a totalitarian political order than to a democracy. Unless institutional correctives restrict factions, political instability and the consequent public exasperation would pave the way for dictatorship.

Conciliation Machinery in Congress

Such correctives exist within the Congress organisation. The Congress has an elaborate conciliation machinery that is prepared to intervene whenever the factions reach a deadlock. There is the Congress Parliamentary Board which mediates between government and party when acute conflicts arise. Deputations from the High Command to the States have become a regular feature of Congress politics. Various standing and ad hoc committees are appointed by the Congress President and constitute part of this conciliation machinery. Such questions as corruption among Congressmen, communalism and the neglect of minorities as well as specific; charges against ministers are dealt with by these committees. The Central Election Committee and the Pradesh Committees apply themselves carefully to the selection and screening of candidates and settle differences between various organs and interest groups within the party. The conciliation machinery is in almost continuous operation and problems arising from the working of factions constantly call for solution. The dangers inherent in the system are partly avoided by such timely mediation. The conciliation machinery wields considerable influence.
as it derives its authority directly from the High Command. On the other hand, it is certain that its present efficacy depends on the presence of outstanding leaders who have the interest of the nation at heart. Once, however, the faction system heroines all-pervasive and the power conflicts at the Centre come into open with each leader trying to build up support in the organisation, such a machinery will become ineffective. This tendency would be corrected only by a complete division within the Congress organisation all along the hierarchy which would lead to the formation of a genuine party system free from factions.

**Swatantra Party Fills a Gap**

Much would depend on the smoothness with which such a development takes place. The faction system has been performing an important function during the difficult period of transition from a national movement in which all sections of opinion joined together to a full-fledged party system in which the public is asked to choose between competing parties and programmes. With the rise of such a party system, each party will have to close its ranks when faced by other parties, although every party would still continue to perform its pluralist function of representing diverse social interests within itself. It is very difficult to trace the steps by which such a development would occur. The fragmentation of the democratic opposition within the country seems to have no sign of ending. The "menace" of the Communist Party adds to this fragmentation by forcing the other opposition groups to work with the Congress, thus preventing the building up of a strong and unified organisation which alone can ensure success at the polls. Such fragmentation leads to the emergence of local parties, which while they can successfully compete with the Congress in selected areas, have neither the leadership nor the organisation to spread their influence. Further, such localised parties, because they do not have to answer to a diverse electorate, tend to be parochial in nature. They cannot represent different interests cutting across the non-sectarian divisions within society.

The formation of the Swatantra Party has filled an important gap in Indian politics: a rightist party performs a useful function in a democracy. That its programme is largely negative does not matter: such is the politics of the right when in opposition. To condemn the party because it represents "vested interests" is also wrong. All political parties start by representing interests. But the party suffers from the same traits as other opposition parties. It lacks unity, is without sound leadership, is weak in organisation and its appeal is confined to the discontented. It is rigid in its approaches to other parties. The main function it performs at the present is, therefore, of influencing the Congress at the margin through factions within the Congress.

Among parties with narrow local influence, the most prominent seems to be the Jan Sangh which is now trying to free itself from its sectional past, to build up a sound organisation and capitalist on the growing discontent with the Congress party. It may well emerge as a major opposition group in some States. It has not however, succeeded, in attracting progressive individuals, and is too encumbered by its past and lacks dynamic leadership. So long as its successes are largely negative and built upon the discontent of minorities, its future is doubtful and it is dangerous to the political development of the country inspite of its avowed secularism.

There are two great dilemmas of Indian politics that are prominently reflected in the party system. One concerns the place of the Communist Party in it. A political situation in which the Communist Party appears as the only alternative to the Congress is unthinkable. The totalitarian dangers of a communist rise to power are obvious. But this danger also causes the adoption of totalitarian tactics by parties of the right. The communists are prevented from coming to power by parliamentary tactics. At the same time, continued rule by the same party ultimately leads to a situation where the public begin to crave for a change—any change. The paradoxical situation in which a large number of people who dislike the Congress are nevertheless obliged to vote for it cannot continue for long. Change, when it comes would be catastrophic. The political strategy adopted by other opposition parties in face of the Communist 'threat' — which obsesses them more than it does even the Congress—prevents them from concentrating on building up their own organisations. This prevents any party other than the Communist Party from emerging as an alternative to the Congress.

**Communist Tactics**

The Communists, on the other hand, realising that the Congress will not allow them to come to power easily, adopt more roundabout and flexible techniques. They concentrate their efforts on strategic areas hoping to make them pockets of power from where the "movement" can be directed. At the same time they make every attempt to make themselves acceptable to the public. The Dange-line on China, the Amritsar thesis and active participation in legislative activities make the communists appear respectable. At the same time they have also launched on a process of "permeation". Their influence on Congressmen, some in important positions, whose democratic convictions are not strong, is well-known. The acute rivalry between factions within the Congress is also driving leaders of the factions to strengthen their hands by accepting the support of pro-communists and giving them important positions. (This is one of the most disturbing aspects of the working of factions within Congress: the opportunistic alliance of factions with communists and communals. With this has started a process of Communist "infiltration" in the ruling party, the government and the non-political agencies.) Once the Communists succeed in controlling a few key positions in the Congress or the government, the political situation will be transformed.

The other dilemma of Indian politics is closely related. It follows partly from the impact of modern ideas on a traditional society and partly from the means adopted to bring about change. The Congress is pledged to speedy industrialisation and uplift of the masses. The means it has selected to implement its policies are essentially alien to the traditional order. A wedge is drawn between Congressmen preaching "western" methods and the people who respond to traditional modes of thought and conduct. The problems being tackled are, however, real problems. The result is that the masses desire
change without comprehending the nature of that change. They expect a sudden transformation of their conditions. This creates tension. While expectations are dramatically aroused, the programmes adopted fall short of fulfilling them. Frustration mounts and the argument for adopting other and more speedy methods of change become increasingly attractive. Such arguments—for example, the ease for giving power to a dictator or a disciplined "vanguard" for a few years find ready response in a traditionally authoritarian society. The Congress may itself succumb to such pressures both from fear of losing power and under the influence of new ideologies.

The Future—Uncertain

What is preventing such a development is the presence of a leadership steeped in liberal values. This leadership is now ageing. The ideological convictions of the newly emerging leadership are not yet clear. Meanwhile, institutions continue to he in a state of flux, thus exaggerating the importance of individuals. Much would depend on the development of the party system and the extent to which it imparts stability to existing institutions. In the meantime, in the transition period the factions within political parties are playing an important part. They have made for political mobility within limits, effective opposition to authority and consequent division of power. The dangers they give rise to are also clear: instability, too much emphasis on personalities and political intrigue. What the future holds in store is not clear. But it would largely depend on the extent to which the present system of political power being exercised by factions can transform itself into a democratic party system which would make a smooth change in government possible.

Notes
1. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation".
3. The opposing views have been documented in Thomas A Rusch, "Dynamics of Socialist Leadership in India" in Richard Park and Irene Tinker, Leadership and Political Institutions in India, pp 197-200.

4. For details of the merger, see Myron Weiner, Party Politics in India, pp 98-116.
5. The three types have been discussed at length by Maurice Duverger in his Political Parties.
6. For classification of party systems on these lines, see Sigmund Neumann (ed), Modern Political Parties, p 400 ff.
8. Thomas A Rusch, op cit p 205.
11. For a discussion of the idea of unity see the article on Panchayati Raj in this series.
14. For an analysis of the relations between government and party in a parliamentary democracy, see Robert McKenzie, British Political Parties, especially pp 9-15, 582-585.
15. The relations between the party organisation and the parliamentary party in India have been dealt in historical detail in W H Morris-Jones, Parliament in India, pp 166-185.
17. For comment, see The Times of India, 26-4-61, "Dangers of Communist Infiltration" by R Shiva Rao.

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