INDIA’S political leadership is committed to the task of raising the living standards of the people while remaining wedded to democratic institutions. The Government has to invest the limited resources at its command in plans and programmes that would benefit the nation in general. The problem, however, is not one of resources and administrative organisation alone. The people are divided into groups which have their own specific interests and demands. (Such groups may be referred to as interest-groups.) A great deal of adaptation on the part of the Government to the needs, prejudices and demands of the various groups becomes necessary. Since it is impossible for the Government to satisfy all the demands of all the interest-groups, especially when they conflict with national plans, there is a tendency to regard such demands as illegitimate. Interest-groups, thus, tend to become alienated from the political system. They resort to certain patterns of coercive behaviour, such as demonstrations, strikes and violence, leading to a breakdown of order — with unfavourable consequences for programmes of economic development.

Safe Margin of Bargaining

The author believes that in an underdeveloped country such as India, where economic development is given considerable importance, the policy-makers and planners tend to ignore the political aspects of the process. While attempting to secure the maximisation of national interests, the governmental and bureaucratic elites do not give enough attention to the particularistic demands of interest-groups. The author feels that there is a safe margin of bargaining within which interest groups could be given concessions. He says that the Government, by accommodating special interests to national plans in a peaceful and legitimate manner, would not have to yield in the end to demonstrations, strikes and violence. If the Government were to take the initiative in approving and encouraging legitimate bargaining, the benefits would be substantial. The interest-groups themselves would begin to appreciate that peaceful negotiation is a method that would serve not only the interests of the nation but their own interests as well. For, an important test of the stability of a political system is the extent to which it becomes acceptable to wider and wider sections of the people. The people must not only have a common stake in the system, but also consciously participate in it.

II

Much of the discussion in the book is based on the author’s research experience in West Bengal. He has, however, tried to fill the gap, in his knowledge of the functioning of interest-groups in the country by interviewing leaders of such groups from the other states. A great deal of generalisation is inevitable in a study of this kind. But, this is not to be regarded as a flaw, since the author is not seeking specific answers to limited problems, but is trying to understand the broad political problems that a developing country such as India faces.

III

Dr Weiner empirically examines the characteristics and activities of the various interest-groups. The demands of most of the groups have a history, and their origin can be traced to the nationalist movement. Swaraj, for the nationalists, implied much more than independence from British rule. It meant the creation of a social order in which the demands and aspirations of all categories of people would be satisfied. The peasants were promised radical land-reforms. Industrial labour was assured of higher wages and better living conditions. Businessmen were told that the restrictions imposed on Indian business in the interests of British business would be removed after independence. This would ensure that proper conditions for successful trade and commerce prevailed. The middle classes were made to believe that large-scale industrialisation and modernisation would never be possible under colonial rule. Regional-linguistic groups were assured that a nationalist government would reorganise the country’s internal boundaries to suit regional-cultural feelings. The poor and underprivileged were promised an egalitarian social order. And, finally, the students were made conscious of their own dignity and self-respect. In other words, the nationalists were creating a whole series of expectations among the people. And, since the Government in Independent India was formed eventually by the nationalists, the expectations of the people were directed towards it. Groups of people who had common needs and interests began to organise themselves in order to make their demands felt in an effective manner. Political parties which were interested in getting a foothold in Indian politics tried to get support for themselves by incorporating the demands of interest-groups in their programmes. The support of political parties gave interest-groups an articulate leadership, and it ultimately became possible to violate the law in order to make their demands felt.

IV

The author makes a distinction between two types of interest-groups: one type he calls community associations, and the other, mass organisations. Membership of the former is ascriptive, while membership of the latter is voluntary. There are four major types of community associations in Indian politics, based on caste, religion, tribe and language. Mass organisations refer to associations of peasants, industrial-workers, businessmen and students.

Of the four community associations, caste groups play a very significant role in the politics of the country. Castes no longer have a local base but have spread out hori-
horizontally with the development of communications, urbanisation, and with the introduction of adult franchise. The sentiments of caste affiliation are used in an increasing range of social and political activities. A local caste may be organised, as in the Scheduled Castes Federation, to win benefits for itself under the constitutional provisions for scheduled castes. It may support a political party, like the Kammas of Andhra Pradesh who support the Communists. Caste may also play an independent political role. In Madras, for example, the Palli caste—an intermediate caste of agricultural labourers—organised the Tamilnad Toiler's Party and the Commonweal Party to demand greater educational opportunities and greater political power. A group of castes may form an alliance against another caste, like the DK and DMK in the South, which are organised, against the Brahmins. Finally, a caste may be organised on an ad hoc basis as in village panchayat elections.

In whatever form castes are organised, they seek to maximise the benefits they can derive for themselves both in the economic and political sphere. A locally powerful caste in a rural area can, and does reap most of the benefits of agricultural development programmes. And this is something that conflicts with the Government's aim which is to see that the gains of development are distributed evenly over the whole rural community.

Religion, Tribe, Language

Religious and tribal associations have resulted from the fear of being culturally obliterated in the process of modernisation. The Akali Dal, a religious association of the Sikhs, has agitated for the creation of a Sikh majority state which would preserve the integrity of the Sikh community. Tribal associations have been formed, either to maximise economic benefits and employment opportunities, as in West Bengal, or, in the form of political parties— as the Jharkhand Party in Orissa—to win power within the existing political system. Finally, as in the case of the Naga National Council in Assam, attempts have been made to secede from the Indian Union.

The demand for linguistic provinces by language groups posed a great threat to the peace and unity of the country. The Government, faced with the prospect of seeing its plans for economic development completely paralysed, was forced to respond to the demand for linguistic states—although this was contrary to its original intention.

The relations between the Government and trade unions dramatise the conflict between the productive requirements of the state and the consumption requirements of organised groups. The demands of trade unions are apparently directed against the management, but, if one takes a broader view, they are closely bound up with Government and politics: A great many of the actions of the unions are conditioned by government legislation and administration. The initiative taken by Government for conciliation and arbitration makes it unnecessary for the management to consult labour. And, when labour refuses to accept tribunal judgements and resorts to a strike, the strike is termed illegal—and Government comes hi as a protector of the management.

The trade union movement in India is divided by three conflicting political pulls. The Government, the Congress Party and the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) have moderate unionism as their ideal. This, they believe, will not only safeguard the interests of the workers but contribute to the economic growth of the country. The Socialists and their union, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), believe in militant unionism. The economic interests of the workers are regarded as paramount and there is a readiness to participate in strikes. Finally, the Communist dominated All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) believes that militant unionism can be used as an instrument for the Communist Party to win power and destroy the institutions of representative government.

The author says that it is doubtful whether moderate unionism can ultimately win against militant unionism. What is needed is militant unionism committed to the democratic framework. Only this kind of unionism can compete successfully with the 'totalitarian' unionism of the Communists. This means that Government and private business would have to agree to increase the share of labour in the national dividend. Consequently, the practicable rate of investment in industry would be reduced.

Organised Business

In a country such as India, committed to the socialistic pattern of society, the business communities have to adapt themselves to the policies and programmes of the government. According to the author, though business in India is well organised, its impact on the policies of the Central government is negligible. Many persons expected that the Swatantra Party would provide a powerful forum of representation for the interests of the business communities. This, however, did not happen because Indian business is almost wholly at the mercy of government regulations for permission to undertake activities of importance to it. Therefore, at the level of politics and public policy the business communities are in line with the policies of the national leadership. They support the Congress Party and make substantial donations to its funds. But, it is at the level of the administration that businessmen succeed in exerting pressures that enable them to derive benefits to themselves. This is especially so at the level of the State Government administration. The "bakshish" system, a euphemism for bribery, enables businessmen to move the otherwise rigid wheels of the administration to enable them to proceed with their activities. For example, licences are needed to open a new business, but businessmen can buy licences through the local Congress Party and the local administration. Or, again, through the "bakshish" system import restrictions can be effectively by-passed. Organised business is thus able to get more or less what it wants not by overtly opposing the socialistic policies of Government, but by covertly manipulating the local administration, or the local party organisation.

The chapter on agrarian movements is interesting. The relatively stable position of the Congress Party is attributable to its strength in the rural areas. The powerful agricultural classes, more especially the emerging and influential class of owner-cultivators, tend to support the Congress. This is related to the
zontally with the development of communications, urbanisation, and with the introduction of adult franchise. The sentiments of caste affiliation are used in an increasing range of social and political activities. A local caste may be organised, as in the Scheduled Castes Federation, to win benefits for itself under the constitutional provisions for scheduled castes. It may support a political party, like the Kammas of Andhra Pradesh who support the Communists. Caste may also play an independent political role. In Madras, for example, the Palli caste — an intermediate caste of agricultural labourers — organised the Tamilnad Toiler's Party and the Commonweal Party to demand greater educational opportunities and greater political power. A group of castes may form an alliance against another caste, like the DK and DMK in the South, which are organised, against the Brahmans. Finally, a caste may be organised on an ad hoc basis as in village panchayat elections.

In whatever form castes are organised, they seek to maximise the benefits they can derive for themselves both in the economic and political sphere. A locally powerful caste in a rural area can, and does reap most of the benefits of agricultural development programmes. And this is something that conflicts with the Government's aim which is to see that the gains of development are distributed evenly over the whole rural community.

Religion, Tribe, Language

Religious and tribal associations have resulted from the fear of being culturally obliterated in the process of modernisation. The Akali Dal, a religious association of the Sikhs, has agitated for the creation of a Sikh majority state which would preserve the integrity of the Sikh community. Tribal associations have been formed, either to maximise economic benefits and employment opportunities, as in West Bengal, or, in the form of political parties — as the Jharkhand Party in Orissa — to win power within the existing political system. Finally, as in the case of the Naga National Council in Assam, attempts have been made to secede from the Indian Union.

The demand for linguistic pro-

vines by language groups posed a great threat to the peace and unity of the country. The Government, faced with the prospect of seeing its plans for economic development completely paralysed, was forced to respond to the demand for linguistic states — although this was contrary to its original intention.

The relations between the Government and trade unions dramatise the conflict between the productive requirements of the state and the consumption requirements of organised groups. The demands of trade unions are apparently directed against the management, but, if one takes a broader view, they are closely bound up with Government and politics: A great many of the actions of the unions are conditioned by government legislation and administration. The initiative taken by Government for conciliation and arbitration makes it unnecessary for the management to consult labour. And, when labour refuses to accept tribunal judgements and resorts to a strike, the strike is termed illegal — and Government comes in as a protector of the management.

The trade union movement in India is divided by three conflicting political pulls. The Government, the Congress Party and the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) have moderate unionism as their ideal. This, they believe, will not only safeguard the interests of the workers but contribute to the economic growth of the country. The Socialists and their union, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), believe in militant unionism. The economic interests of the workers are regarded as paramount and there is a readiness to participate in strikes. Finally, the Communist dominated All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) believes that militant unionism can be used as an instrument for the Communist Party to win power and destroy the institutions of representative government.

The author says that it is doubtful whether moderate unionism can ultimately win against militant unionism. What is needed is militant unionism committed to the democratic framework. Only this kind of unionism can compete successfully with the "totalitarian" unionism of the Communists. This means that Government and private business would have to agree to increase the share of labour in the national dividend. Consequently, the practicable rate of investment in industry would be reduced.

Organised Business

In a country such as India, committed to the socialist pattern of society, the business communities have to adapt themselves to the policies and programmes of the government. According to the author, though business in India is well organised, its impact on the policies of the Central government is negligible. Many persons expected that the Swatantra Party would provide a powerful forum of representation for the interests of the business communities. This, however, did not happen because Indian business is almost wholly at the mercy of government regulations for permission to undertake activities of importance to it. Therefore, at the level of politics and public policy the business communities are in line with the policies of the national leadership. They support the Congress Party and make substantial donations to its funds. But, it is at the level of the administration that businessmen succeed in exerting pressures that enable them to derive benefits to themselves. This is especially so at the level of the State Government administration. The "bakshish" system, a euphemism for bribery, enables businessmen to move the otherwise rigid wheels of the administration to enable them to proceed with their activities. For example, licences are needed to open a new business, but businessmen can buy licences through the local Congress Party and the local administration. Or, again, through the "bakshish" system import restrictions can be effectively by-passed. Organised business is thus able to get more or less what it wants not by overfly opposing the socialist policies of Government, but by covertly manipulating the local administration, or the local party organisation.

The chapter on agrarian movements is interesting. The relatively stable position of the Congress Party is attributable to its strength in the rural areas. The powerful agricultural classes, more especially the emerging and influential class of owner-cultivators, tend to support the Congress. This is related to the

605
Out of this log of wood

WESTERN INDIA PLYWOODS
make the widest range of specialised
plywoods and hardboards

Today modern industry and architecture demand woods in a variety of specially processed forms: aircrafts demand light yet strong plywoods; engine rooms require fireproof plywoods; radio cabinets need specially processed plywoods for resonance; building construction and coach building demand oil-tempered super hardboards. Western India Plywoods, the largest manufacturers of processed woods in India, make numerous varieties and sizes of plywoods and hardboards to meet such industrial, architectural and defence needs of our country. They are marketed under the trade names 'Westindply' for plywoods, and 'Weston' for hardboards. Other products include 'Wipex' paper laminates for table tops and dining tables, Flushdoors and Block Boards.

... Chairs, table tops, panels, shelves, cupboards, flooring—infinite is the scope of 'Westindply', 'Weston' and 'Wipex'

"Westindply" plywoods are made available in a wide variety of veneers to add charm and colour to the living room.

Specially shaped compressed wood seats—only Western India Plywoods make them in India—for railway coaches, supplied to the Integral Coach Factory, Perambur.

THE WESTERN INDIA PLYWOODS LIMITED
P. O. BAILAPATAM, CANNANOORE DISTRICT, KERALA STATE
fact that they stand to benefit from Government plans for agricultural development. But, as the author himself acknowledges, this very fact creates a bottleneck for structural changes in rural areas. For example, the Congress Party resolution at Nagpur that India's future agrarian pattern should be based on a system of joint cooperative farms, was met with heavy opposition from State politicians concerned with the political consequences of the proposal. Thus, while it is possible for the national leadership to take a radical view of agricultural matters, the same cannot be said for the State governments. The politicians at the State level who are extremely sensitive to local pulls and pressures are often, for this very reason, at odds with the policies of the Centre.

Students as a Pressure-Group

In the chapter on students, the author is concerned with the role of students in Indian politics. An increasing number of students who join the universities are from rural areas. The fact that a number of these students belong to influential families in the rural sector makes them attractive recruits for political parties. The author says, in addition, that the growing "ruralisation" of Indian universities is related, in part, to student indiscipline. Both rural and urban students regard the university degree rather than university education as such as the pre-condition for employment. And to the extent that employment is not forthcoming, they do not feel themselves committed to the educational process.

An interesting distinction is made between students of the liberal arts and law, on the one hand, and students of science, engineering and agriculture, on the other. The latter do not face any acute employment problems since they are, generally, absorbed into various technical professions. Hence, they do not present any major disciplinary problems. Students of arts and law, however, find it far more difficult to find employment. Political parties, such as the Communist Party, capitalise on this problem and succeed in recruiting a large number of supporters from among the ever-growing category of 'educated unemploy-ed'.

VI

The author concludes his discussion by suggesting five methods by which the pressure of political demands on Government may be reduced: First, Government should avoid involving itself in matters which do not threaten the broad public interest. This would ensure that conflicts are dissipated within the society and not directly focussed on the central authority. Labour and management, for example, could settle differences between themselves within the framework of laws and rules. There is no need for the Government to intervene. In this way it would be possible for the centre to reap the benefits of a federal political structure. It need not burden itself with the problem of dealing with all conflicts that arise in the society. The various State Governments could be relied upon to perform this task.

Second, there should be consultative bodies (a device already in use) which provide opportunities for organised groups to make consultations with Government agencies. At present, however, these bodies do not adequately represent interest-groups. If this shortcoming were to be remedied there would be an improvement in communication between Government and organised groups which would, in turn, greatly facilitate the settling of differences in a peaceful manner.

Will Decentralisation Help?

Third, local government institutions should be strengthened; they should be given greater power and responsibilities. The author believes that so long as local government institutions perform their tasks, the State and Central governments will be strengthened. He seems to imply that the persons who form local government bodies would have a sense of public duty and responsibility. But, it is precisely at such levels that powerful interest-groups, like caste associations, exert the greatest influence and pressure. Therefore, far from helping the State and Central Governments to implement policies, local bodies might, in fact, impede them.

Fourth, decisions affecting major economic investments, such as the building of a steel factory, or the location of an oil refinery, should be made by technicians and administrators—and not by politicians. When politicians make such decisions, it is natural that pressure groups would try and coerce, the Government to gain favours for themselves.

It is questionable whether this kind of measure is really feasible—or desirable. In fact, the author himself has contended that in a nation like India, wedded to democracy, the politician has to be responsive to public pressures and demands. Furthermore, even if major economic decisions are taken solely by technicians and administrators, policy-makers will not be able to escape the pressure of group demands. Pressure groups can as effectively exert coercive influences on the policy-makers by the methods of demonstrations, strikes and violence, leading ultimately to a breakdown of peace and order. Therefore, the central problem of implementing plans of national importance in the face of conflicting pressures and pulls would remain.

Fifth, the attitudes of the interest-groups should be influenced so that they become conscious of their public responsibility. In order to achieve this end, the Government should take into consideration the opinions and views of leaders of interest-groups and make them feel that they have a stake in public matters.
tion to the demands of various interest groups it will not be possible to enthuse the people to participate fully in programmes of development, the democratic framework of Indian planning makes it necessary to have all sections of the nation represented in the process of development.

At the end of the study, however, the author tends to view the demands of interest-groups with a certain reserve. He says that to the extent "government accedes to these various demands, economic modernisation may be impeded in a number of ways" (page 249). Further on, he says: "If one views India's primary task as that of achieving maximum economic growth in the shortest period of time, then the developments suggested in this study might be viewed with deep alarm" (page 257). Statements such as these do not appear to be consistent with the author's fundamental point that for the healthy growth of a democracy in India all the key groups in the political system should get an adequate opportunity to bargain legitimately for their rights.

One might very well ask whether it is wholly necessary for the government of a democratic country such as India to regard the pressure of public demands on itself with grave apprehension. On the contrary, the pressure of public demands should be regarded as symbolic of the desire for development — however particularistic that desire might be. The range and variety of groups in India, and their respective regional affiliations, make it inevitable that public pressures are exerted most at the structural points that divide one group from another, or one region from another. The policymakers and planners have got to bear this in mind.

Dr Weiner has suggested that "until and unless there is more precise information on the political consequences of public investments, it would probably be wiser to remove investment decisions from the political arena" (pp 243-244). This implies in overstressing of the concept of economic rationality which does not really fit in with any democratic system and, in particular, that of a vast and diverse country such as India's. If the planners and policy-makers want to enthuse the people to participate in the development process, they must give a new meaning to the concept of rationality. The demands of economic rationality have to be toned down, to a certain extent, in order to take some account of the particularistic needs of interest-groups. Though this might involve a sacrifice in terms of rigid economic development, it would be a definite gain in terms of overall national development.