

Another 'Popular' Government

January 23, 1982

THE resumption of the talks between the Centre and the leaders of the AASU and the AAGSP on the question of 'foreign nationals' in Assam, with the representatives of the Opposition parties participating, is taking place against the background of an intensified renewal of the agitation. The agitation, resumed on November 19 last year, has since gathered in intensity, each day bringing in news of fresh innovations in the method and content of the protests including such novelties as imposition of a boycott on money transactions through post offices, putting off of lights in private premises, etc. Clearly, both the Centre and the leaders of the agitation agree upon a policy of simultaneous agitation and repression on the one hand and negotiations on the other.

However, in the midst of all the agitation, the Centre — in this case, the Congress(I) as the ruling party — has not lost sight of its singleminded aim of forming a 'popular' government in the state. With the crucial help of the Governor (who was, and perhaps continues to be, an active member of the ruling party), this the Congress(I) has been able to do, though the Congress(I) legislature party, even on its own admission, not merely does not command a majority in the assembly but is split and, on the eve of its forming the government, was also affected by some desertions following the

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 'resignation' of Anwara Taimur from the leadership of the Congress(I) legislature party and the 'election' of Keshub Gogoi to that position.

Leaving aside the question whether this new ministry will at all affect the present abnormal situation in the state — let alone tackle it successfully — it is a moot point whether even the limited objective of retaining office is within its capacity. For the 'resignation' of Anwara Taimur from the leadership of the Congress(I) legislature party was not entirely voluntary and moreover came about over six months after she resigned from the office of chief ministership, following defections from a legislature party which even in the beginning had not had a majority in the house. Her exit and the election of Keshub Gogoi as her successor has been followed by certain interesting resignations from the Congress(I) legislature party; and Anwara Taimur was conspicuously absent from the swearing-in ceremony of the new Chief Minister. That the new Chief Minister continues to head a one-man cabinet even a week after being sworn in is not surprising in view of the circumstances of his 'election' as leader by the Congress(I) legislature party and the 'invitation' that he duly received from the Governor to form a government.

This induction of a 'popular' ministry in Assam once again highlights the complete subversion of the constitutional provisions by the ruling party at the Centre to suit party or even factional ends. This was the case with the installation of the Anwara Taimur ministry too which moreover even failed to fulfil the presumed constitutional requirements. Now, once again, the internal problems of the Congress(I) have become the determining factor affecting matters of government and even state policy.

23-January-1982.

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