

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WWU - 9
HIMALAYAN CONSTITUTION DAY

Hotel Royal, Bahadur Bhawan,
Kathmandu, Nepal.
February 12, 1959.

Mr. Walter S. Rogers.
Institute of Current World Affairs.
366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

This morning I watched King Mahendra (short for 53 other names) proclaim Nepal's first Constitution in the courtyard of the Gurkha Kings' ancient Hanuman Dhoka Palace. On February 18, less than a week away, Nepal will hold its first elections. Polling will last until April 3, to permit the voting teams to walk through the snows and high passes to the far reaches of this Himalayan kingdom. Unquestionably, this is an auspicious day for Nepal. It is the first day of the Spring festival. It is proclamation day -- and the heavens sent down rain at the very moment King Mahendra was being blessed by the High Priest during the proclamation ceremony. It is the day on which a big Russian aid delegation is due to arrive. And, just to balance things out in neutral Nepal, it is Abraham Lincoln's birthday and the American Library on New Road here in Kathmandu has a special display of the Great Emancipator's speeches.

Nepal is a pretty insignificant part of the Asian subcontinent: 56,000 square miles in area (about the size of Iowa); 8.5 million people (plus uncounted Abominable Snowmen); the highest pieces of real estate on earth (Everest, Annapoorna, et al); and a malarial belt on its southern Tenai jungle (complete with tigers and rhinos) which historically has provided a "Keep Out" sign where the mountains didn't. Although Nepal encompasses the birthplace of Gautama, Lord Buddha, it presently enjoys a potpourri religion which combines Buddhism, Hinduism and the deification of the male reproductive organ. Phallic symbolism is everywhere and it is particularly blatant on the frescoes of a temple immediately outside the Royal Coronation Door. Yet even when proud fathers hold their tiny daughters up high to see the pretty illustrations, Uncle Sam somehow gets the blame: "We never noticed these things until you Americans started taking pictures of them," one, all-innocent Nepalese told me. Until just a few years back, Nepal, this "Hidden Kingdom," was closed to the outside world save for India and Tibet, her neighbors, and the British, who used to be invited everywhere. In strict adherence to the time belt (or perhaps individuality), Nepal time runs 10 minutes ahead of New Delhi. And for the past 100 years or so, Nepal, like Japan's



THE KING: Receiving sacramental oils during proclamation ceremony

Emperor-controlling Shoguns and Laos' ruling "King Who Goes Before," had its Ranas, hereditary Prime Ministers who tolerated the King for breeding purposes only.



NEPALESE: Traditional faces; new airport

Then came the Revolution, ironically led by a King and pretty much aided and abetted by neighboring neutral India. The King, Tribhuvan, father of the present Mahendra, in November, 1950 fled first to the Indian Embassy here in Kathmandu and then to India itself in protest over Rana bullying. The Ranas made one of Tribhuvan's young sons King. But the Indians proved stronger than the Ranas and helped Tribhuvan return in glory to his kingdom in February, 1951. Most of the Ranas then decided it was their turn to go to India and packed off gold and jewels to make life in exile bearable. Tribhuvan immediately showed his good intentions by promising that one of his first orders of business would be to hold elections for members of a Constitutional Assembly. But Cabinets came and went without somehow getting around to arranging for an election which would limit their power. And the King, his promise unfulfilled, died in 1955. His son Mahendra then went through the rigamarole of changing Prime Ministers and Cabinets in search of the stability needed to precede an election. Finally in January, 1958, after the word "stalling" gained general currency, the King promised elections would begin this February 18. He also appointed a Constitutional Commission. And he removed any doubts about who would approve the new Constitution by announcing that he would promulgate it himself.

The politicians, horrified at the thought that their main battle cry -- "We want elections" -- was actually to be answered, promptly adopted an attitude of complete disbelief. After all, until now any politician could walk up to the King, announce he was the most popular man in the Kingdom and therefore the logical choice for Prime Minister -- and safely dare anyone to prove otherwise. And really it wasn't until this morning's constitutional proclamation -- announced only 24 hours ahead of time -- that the politicians knew they **actually** would have a Constitution setting out what they would be elected to (the "Pratinidhi Sabha," or Parliamentary Lower House).

But now the Constitution has at last been proclaimed (promulgation comes later, when the King decides he is ready) and it was quite a ceremony. With only 24 hours notice, Nepal officialdom did a bangup job of turning out in court uniform with all their brass and braid glistening. The red carpet was unrolled from the brass coronation door out toward the pornographic temple. The foreign press corps was in attendance: The New York Times and London Sunday Observer had fortuitously arrived to study elections the day before; an ex-Fortune research girl managed to be on hand for Time, Inc. and record that the King had a Parker 61 poking out from his left lapel pocket; and this absent-on-leave minion from The Washington Post got in on it too. The press not only was unexpectedly ushered over the red carpet and through the coronation door ahead of the King, but luckily arrived early enough to see the show from its premature beginning. The British Ambassador and his Lady, who arrived punctually at the appointed hour of 11:40 a.m., found themselves late and were ushered red-faced to their front-row seats.

First there was the blessing of foods by an aged High Priest gowned in gold lamé. Then an endless sacred lamentation by an instrumental trio.



Then the national anthem. Finally, the proclamation itself. But Robert Montgomery never managed this show. The King, expressionless, unsmiling and hidden behind dark glasses (I am told he even wears them at royal banquets), sat enthroned in the corner recesses of the courtyard. And when he got up to do his proclaiming, he found another corner, sidled back into the very shadows -- and then turned his back on the assembled to do his reading. As soon as the King had departed in his Cadillac convertible there was a mad scramble onto the Royal dais to get copies of the Constitution and see what it was all about. I had promised the U.S. Embassy political officer from New Delhi that I would grab two copies of the Constitution for him

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and country while he held the waiting plane. In my eagerness, I started to clutch at the copies held in the gloved hands of the British Ambassador, but, faced with the stern face of Britannia, thought better of it. After due study by the Embassy political officer, it appears that His Majesty is accepting the title of Constitutional Monarch while still keeping a firm grasp on the kingdom's purse strings, retaining the right to choose his own Prime Minister and the prerogative to remain beyond the review of any court in the land. The Constitution also creates a 109-seat, elected Lower House which must face reelection in five years; a 36-seat Upper House whose members are alternately named by the King and the Lower House; a Privy Council; and certain provisions to protect fundamental political and religious freedoms. London's Ivor Jennings, who had a hand in the Indian and Ceylonese Constitutions, is credited with being the chief draftsman for the Nepal document. King Mahendra declared: "It has been and continues to be Our long and cherished desire that this Constitution conferred by Us may be most effective in cementing the unity of the Nation

Top to Bottom:

PREPARATION: Monkey God with parasol; brass Coronation Door; and the Red Carpet.

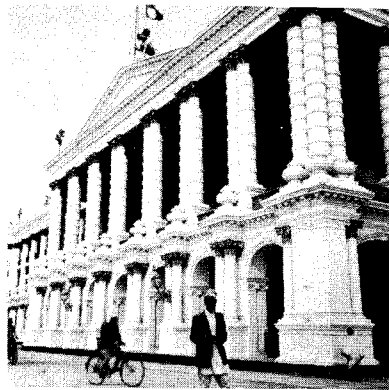
PROCLAMATION: King Mahendra and Crown Prince after the salient words were spoken.

SALUTATION: Nepalese military and civilian officialdom do an eyes-left toward Royal Dais.

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and in making the Nepalese people prosperous, honoured and progressive for a long time to come."



ALL NEPAL IN ONE PALACE

I went over to the Central Secretariat which houses the whole Government, making Nepal perhaps the world's only one-building Government. It is a great palace, the home of the last (and unlamented) Rana Prime Minister. Its rooms are variously estimated at 1000 to 1600. Some people say Old Rana had one room for each of his wives. If true; this would represent the height of conspicuous consumption. After all, one man needs only enough women for each night of the nine-month reproductive cycle. After that he can start renewing acquaintances. Forgive the digression. It has been bothering me. I really went over to the Secretariat to interview Col. Suberna

Shum Sher Jang Bahadur Rana (since the last five names of all Ranas are always the same, it usually is signed, "Suberna SSJBR"), Chairman of His Majesty's Election Commission. Suberna had some experience with elections when his Rana relatives at one time toyed with the idea. So when the King regained power he decided to hold on to Suberna, even if he was a Rana. And for the last eight years, Suberna has been getting ready to get set for next week's election.

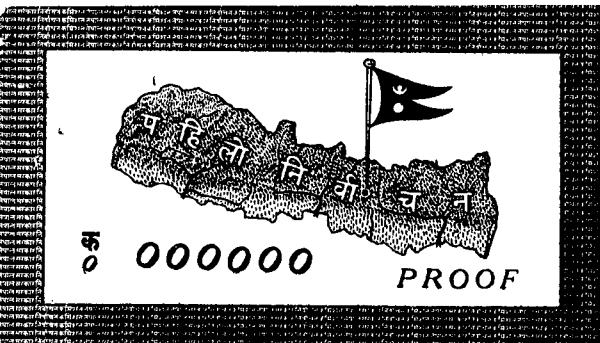
Suberna expects anywhere from 45 to 50 per cent of Nepal's 4½ million eligible voters (universal suffrage at 21) to vote. Home Minister D.R. Regmi, who takes a dim view of holding any election at all even though it is his job to police it, anticipates a turnout of only 20 per cent. Col. Suberna has set aside 18 polling days between February 18 and April 3 and will have trained teams moving from poll station to poll station. The British and Indians are contributing wireless sets to help flash back results from the far reaches of the Kingdom. The Indian election system also has served as a model, a helpful experience when you start conducting elections from scratch.



SUBERNA SSJBR...

A political group is recognized as a national party if it puts up 22 candidates for the 109 parliamentary seats at stake. As of now, nine parties have so qualified and their emblems have been duly approved for ballot box imprimatur by Suberna's staff. The emblems are graphic and simple: an oak tree, a hand, a sickle with an ear of corn (the local Communists), an umbrella, a plow, a hut (symbol of a landlord group whom gossips have the Ranas backing) and a horse. At the moment, 865 candidates are running for the 109 available seats (including several rajahs, 48 Communist Party

candidates, 337 independents and several women). One seat is being contested by no less than 16 candidates. And one candidate is running for three seats at once (Suberna says it is perfectly legal). All candidates are required to put up a deposit which they forfeit if they fail to poll one-sixth of the total votes cast. So far, nearly 100 candidates have gotten faint-hearted, withdrawn their deposits and backed out. When election time comes, voters, listed on voting lists, will step up to a registration table, identify themselves, have their wrist stamped with indelible ink and then be handed



THE BALLOT: Into the right box



KATHMANDU PREPARES TO VOTE: Party posters on town balconies; Reading government how-to-do-it instructions; and the Communists on parade for contributions.

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a ballot and ushered into an enclosed area where they will drop this ballot in the box marked with the party emblem of their choice. The voting system is considered pretty near fool-proof, but not quite. For instance, under similar rules in India, the Communists found a way of paying voters to come out from the booth with their ballots intact. When enough of these ballots piled up, a party member would go in to do his own voting, and at the same time cram all the collected ballots into the box to keep his ballot company.

There are voting instructions pasted all around town, as well as party posters and emblems. The Nepali Congress, the party of the King's successful revolution, shows a Rana sitting on the throne as he watches a man being beaten by two of his hired thugs. As I watched the future voters studying the election rules one afternoon, the Communist Party came by parading the regular hammer and sickle flag on red background -- no nonsense about sickle and corn election emblem. I wasn't very disposed ideologically. But I was even less disposed physically: Several of the comrades jiggled my camera arm for a contribution just as I was clicking the shutter.

I have begun this letter with the current events because these are what Nepal is talking about at the moment. But the theme of my 13-month worldwide tour, after all, is the arguments for neutralism and non-alignment and Nepal's neutral position is an interesting one. In addition to trying to survive while Red China peeks around Mt. Everest at her, Nepal is trying to remain neutral from her other neighbor, neutral India.

Britain, when she ran India, used to regard Nepal as just one more princely state. And when India gained her independence, assumed Britain's responsibilities in her neighboring areas and started amalgamating the princely states and pensioning off their maharajas, she no doubt nursed ambitions of amalgamating Nepal. Aggravating this were several factors: The Nepalese exiles in India (including politicians, students and neglected Class B and C Ranas) who had been fighting for popular representation just as India had; the existence of a feudal Rana regime on socialist India's border which was so unpopular it might any day blow up and leave Nepal vulnerable to Red China; and, most importantly, the fait accompli of China's taking over Tibet in 1950. Tibet forced young India to look away from her internal struggles and recognize that she had a border problem. With understandable self-interest, India encouraged the Nepalese revolutionists within her own borders, slipped arms and troops over the border the moment the revolt was announced (an American agricultural technician

just happened to be surveying the right field in northern India at the right time when the Indian troops were secretly mobilizing) and helped the balking Ranas out and the ignored King back in. This last, neutral India did with great finesse. First the King was given asylum in the Indian Embassy here in Kathmandu, then in India itself. With equal dexterity, India provided asylum for the Ranas when they decided to clear out. The Indian Ambassador has been called Nepal's unofficial Governor General. One holder of this post reportedly was so obvious with his power that he thought nothing of sending word to the Palace to hold up a Cabinet meeting as he would be late. The King, out of gratitude to India for restoring him to power, took this. In 1952, for instance, in an Indo-Nepal trade pact, Nepal agreed to give up its unrestricted importation of foreign goods and permit India to act as its customs agent and regulate imports by license and levy. In return, India provided Nepal with some badly needed foreign exchange. India's argument was that there had been too much smuggling of Nepalese imports back into India. To sweeten things, India, which has had a good deal to say about the motives of other countries' foreign aid to her, built a highway over the mountains to Kathmandu Valley, dispensed largesse to Nepalese schools and shipped up all the equipment necessary to build a complete hospital. As far as the hospital is concerned, the Nepalese have never gotten around to assembling it and so the equipment is just rusting away with the monsoon rains. A joint Indo-Nepal dam project also is now underway, but some Nepalese think most of the power and water benefits will be going to India.

From India's point of view, all this is explainable (but never acknowledged) self-interest. Britain long ago ringed her precious India from China and Russia with a series of buffer zones -- Afghanistan, Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal. India sees the wisdom of this and wants to continue it, particularly when there are periodic reports of Chinese troops test probing across the border into Indian territory and Shanghai keeps publishing maps marking sections of North India as Chinese. I am told there is a new Chinese map even marking a section of Nepal as Chinese, and the Russians have copied it in their encyclopedia. Moreover, because of Nepal's peculiar terrain of high mountains with very few passes to connect the intermittent valleys, Nepal's roads from one town must often wander back into India before connecting with another. And the one air route into Nepal -- from Patna, India to Kathmandu -- is run by Indian Airlines Corp., a Government-owned line. There is but one flight a day even though would-be passengers are often turned away. However if India's policy during the first few years following Nepal's revolution seemed to be exploitation and dictatorship, she now has completely reversed that and seems intent in seeing the young Nepalese government grows strong and quick in the face of an expanding China.

This happens to coincide with Nepal's own views of foreign relations. Being neutral from neutral India is one thing. But Nepal also has no desire to be swallowed up by China as neighboring Tibet was. Her relations with China are kept as cordial and correct as possible. Not long ago, Nepal opened a consulate in Lhasa where there are some 30,000 Nepalese living, most of them in the salt trade. Nepal's only other consulates are in Calcutta and Rangoon. Her only embassies are in India (where the Ambassador also covers Peking), London (where the territory includes Moscow) and the recently opened embassy in Washington (which attends to both UN and US business). China, for her part, has managed to be friendly with Nepal without giving too much open antagonism to India. In 1956, for instance, China granted Nepal a loan of almost \$15 million, one-third of it in cash (Indian rupees) and the rest in equipment whose order deadline is this year.

The Soviet aid projects in Nepal have considerable splash. An all-equipped gift hospital was promised some time back and the Russians are expected to soon start seeing that it gets up (in contrast to India's bust). When the King visited Moscow last June, there was an announcement of further aid to come. This is presumably ^{the reason} for this evening's arrival of Russian economic experts. Last December, without as much as a "here we come," the Russians flew in a plush IL-14 -- worth possibly \$500,000 -- and presented it for His Majesty's personal use. I watched the Royal Crest being painted on the plane's sides and then walked up a ladder for an inspection of the interior. The Nepalese technician on duty said I had done the forbidden. But since I was already inside, he decided to show me the kitchen, couches and bathroom. The latest example of Russian bounty is the "gift fleet," only it hasn't been announced -- and for good reason. Somehow, Moscow decided that a small, unused reservoir in the center of Kathmandu would look good with some boats in it. The boats were duly dispatched. But to get to their puddle in the mighty Himalayas, they have had to go by flatcar. Now the gauges narrow on the rail line leading from India to Kathmandu. To get from one gauge to another, the boats, in 30-foot long crates, have to change flatcars. They have been dislodged from their original flat cars but now require a crane for boosting onto the narrower flatcars. The only crane is owned by Uncle Sam and he can't possibly spare it from the work now underway to add 30-miles to Kathmandu's Indian-built road and link it with the Indian border. And should the Russians try moving the fleet by road, there is the problem of the switchback tunnel whose zigzag was never built to accommodate 30-foot long crates. At the moment, the American representatives in Nepal are giggling over the whole affair. But one official sobered up a moment to say that if the damn boats ever were plunked into Kathmandu's town reservoir, as useless as they might be, they nonetheless would be probably the first boats any Nepalese had ever seen. They could become the talk of the town. How do you ever win?



IL-14: From Nikita to Mahendra, with love.

As for her relations with the U.S., Nepal seems to be welcoming all the aid from America she can get, providing it is non-military and stringless. At the moment there is a sizeable USOM (technical assistance) program and an immensely popular "American Library" (they normally are called U.S. Information Service libraries but out of mutual agreement, this one isn't). Ellsworth Bunker, the U.S. Ambassador to India, also is accredited to Nepal. He is this country's only double-duty Ambassador. The U.S. has a feeling that if she had a full-time representative China would want one too. Actually, Nepal is one place where U.S. and Indian foreign policy coincide: Both countries want a strong Nepal to prop up that Chinese border. Even with this mutuality of interest, however, the Nepalese have been known to play one country against the other in order to get the most from both.

Pursuing this neutral problem, I had a talk the other morning with Tanka Prasad Acharya, who holds the record from being the longest Prime Minister in office (18 months) since Nepal kicked out the Ranas. A "professional politician" by his own description, Tanka Prasad has been in Nepal's revolutionary movement for 30 of his 47 years. This includes a 10-year stint in jail for leading an unsuccessful revolt against the Ranas in 1940. Now he has again fallen on ill times. He sat in his tiny, badly-kept side yard and readily conceded that both he and his party probably would lose during the coming election. He is convinced that both the winning majority and the opposition will be "controlled

by India." But back to neutrality. It was Prime Minister Tanka Prasad who really opened Nepal to the outside world by staging a well-publicized coronation of the present King. Even Lowell Thomas was invited in to record the event for "Cinerama."

"When I first came to power," Tanka Prasad told me, "I said that, 'Britain no longer dictates this country's foreign policy and you in India shouldn't either.' Then I concluded a treaty with China in which Nepal accepted China's suzerainty in Tibet and China recognized Nepal as a completely independent sovereign country. I also asked the U.S. to recognize our independence in her aid program, as she had recognized our independence as a country. Your USOM Director said 'No!' I then opened negotiations with Russia and China. Then USOM Director then came to me and said, 'I guess I had better pack up.' I said to him, 'If I were a Communist, I would want Russian and Chinese aid, but I wouldn't want yours too.' I think he understood. The U.S. came around and now we have a separate aid program from India. You know, we want good relations with India. But we don't want to go on being treated as Little Brother."



TANKA PRASAD

Ex-Prime Minister Tanka Prasad also showed a shrewd understanding of U.S. problems. It was he who first intimated to me that the reason the U.S. had no separate Ambassador was the fear of reciprocity with China.

Nara Pratap Thapa, Nepal's Foreign Secretary, is one man I met candid enough to declare that Nepal is very much concerned about her neighbor, China, and particularly about China's activities in nearby Tibet. At 32, Thapa is perhaps the world's youngest Foreign Secretary. "I am very young," he acknowledged, "but you must remember that before 1950 we had no foreign affairs." Thapa has just returned from New York where he assisted Nepal's Foreign Minister at the last UN General Assembly. He also has been given the grand tour of Russia and China. Tactfully, he declared how "impressed" he has been with "America's desire to help." He thinks a Wall Street Journal story last year, reporting that Nepal neither liked nor wanted U.S. foreign aid, was highly inaccurate. "We welcome all aid," Thapa said. Aside from being the key implementer of Nepal's foreign policy, Thapa likes to look upon himself as an historian, one who someday hopes to record Nepal's 2000-year history as a buffer state able to survive.



THAPA

I suppose you can't like everybody, and I most certainly did not like D.R. Regmi, Nepal's Home Minister. The adjacent sneer (Page 9) pretty much conveys the tone of my interview. Regmi's remarks were few and when they did come they were punctuated with either a belch or a yawn. Regmi heads the Nepali National Congress, the titular remnant of the original Nepalese revolutionary group in India. He was Foreign Minister in 1954-55, equates the U.S. with the USSR and then adds that Russia is the wave of the future and the U.S. is doomed because of capitalism. He feels that the Gorkha Parisad, which he calls the "Rana Party," would favor the U.S. and UK if it were returned to power in the coming election. How does the U.S. become involved in Britain's

old bailiwick? "Because it has to step into the imperial shoes of Britain," Regmi explained. Regmi broke with most of the old Nepali National Congress politicians and now is pretty much on his own and not expected to survive the coming election. He has been known to consider himself the country's leading intellectual, and documents this by pointing to the available histories of Nepal on sale, all written by Regmi. Regmi got into politics in his early twenties (he is now 45), was imprisoned by the Ranas for his enterprise and then fled to India where he became a Benares economics professor. When the Ranas were deposed in 1951, he returned. As for relations with India, Regmi differs with Tanka Prasad by about 180 degrees: "We have historical and cultural links with India and no real conflicts. And we are not foreigners in India. Nepalese are not registered under India's Foreign Registration Act," Regmi declared.



REGMI AND SNEER

Field Marshal Kaiser SSJBR is the last of the Class A Ranas still in residence here. (A's, incidentally, are produced by First Wives, usually Brahmin princesses. B's and C's come from lesser stock, sometimes even from the scullery.) Kaiser (It's pronounced "K-zer" and comes not from German or Latin, but Sanskrit) is now 67 and the father of a baby son (out of his new wife, not the old one, the King's sister). He also lives in a large white palace across the street from the King's own and maintains a library which some consider the best in the subcontinent. For decor, Kaiser maintains only a few of the usual bemedaled portraits of his Rana ancestors, preferring instead the portraits of the scholars who have come to use his library. Kaiser keeps a delinquency book. He considers one week sufficient for a borrower to read a small book; two weeks for a medium-size; and three for a large one. In showing me his notations he came across the name of the Indian Ambassador, discovered that he was six weeks overdue and gave facial notice that Indo-Nepalese relations had now become strained. Kaiser said he hopes to bequeath his library to some Nepalese institution but so far has trained no one to care for it or to appreciate his quirks for indexing. "The servants are



KAISER: Regal Rana in Residence

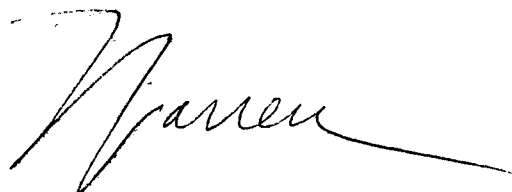
the only ones who get near the books and they just dust," he remarked with I think considerable note of regret. Kaiser's older brother was the Prime Minister removed in the revolution. But Kaiser himself has managed to stay in everybody's good grace. In his time, he has been Defense Minister, Foreign Minister, Army Chief of Staff, chief negotiator between King and Prime Minister during the revolution, chairman of the King's Council of Advisers after the revolution and even Regent in the King's absence. Kaiser still looked pretty regal to me, even though he is now in semi-retirement. And he has such colorful tricks as reaching in his pocket for a jeweled box whenever he feels occasion to spit. Speaking of jewelry, I am still disturbed by my parting with the Field Marshal. I said goodbye and

began hoofing it to the gatehouse at the end of his long driveway. I had just about reached there when a bearer came running after me with a silver cigarette case and a gold lighter. "Thanks, but I don't smoke," I said automatically. The bearer looked crestfallen. Now so do I. You don't suppose Kaiser was giving me the case and lighter, and not just their contents?

Kaiser, by the way, is the "Field Marshal-Philosopher" in Han Suyin's recent caricature of Nepal, "The Mountain Is Young." Kaiser said his daughter gave him a copy to read last year in Paris where he was accompanying the King on his trip to Russia. "It took five days of burning the midnight oil for me to get through it," he explained. "I had to read what she had said about me. But imagine having to do it in Paris!"

I am sure more will soon be heard of Nepal, Field Marshal Kaiser and Han Suyin. As I arrived at Kathmandu's airport the other day, four men in newly-purchased furred hats, looking both impatient and important, were waiting to take the same plane back to India. "Paramount Studios," I was told. "They've been scouting for 'The Mountain Is Young.' They say we may expect Yul Brynner and Ingrid Bergman here by Fall."

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Warren". The signature is written in dark ink and has a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Warren W. Unna

Received New York March 10, 1959