

# frontier

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## IN ONE'S OWN WAY

THE political ripples sent out by the speculation over a premature parliamentary poll in the first half of this year have reached West Bengal. The political parties have suddenly been quickened into accustomed action which consists solely of behind-the-door confabulations and issuing of press statements renewing their pledge to stand by the suffering masses; their paper existence is in greater evidence than at any time before in the past few years. The nine-party alliance under the leadership of the CPI(M) has again threatened to launch a movement. If resolutions were movements, West Bengal would have been in a state of permanent convulsion for quite some time. The left parties have repeated the threat so often that they are no longer taken seriously; nobody cares to keep count of the occasions on which the threat has been uttered. Awareness of this seems to have made the left political parties reckless. They had threatened to launch a movement immediately before the Pujas last year; now they are talking of a movement before the election. They have grown too lethargic to plan even their hoaxes.

The hoax that the CPI sought to perpetrate on the people of this State was better planned. The Order-of-Lenin-winner General Secretary of the party and two of his colleagues in the central leadership came down to Calcutta to steer the course of the six-day conference of the West Bengal unit of the party, creating the impression that the party's national line of uniting with the "progressive section" of the Congress and forming coalition ministries with the Congress at the Centre and in the States is meeting with formidable opposition in the State party. The leakages of the conference proceedings could not but be deliberate. But all ended well with the so-called dissidents bowing down to the wishes of the national leadership and gracefully accepting the immaculate thesis of coalescing with a party harbouring the bulk of the rightist elements in the State to defeat the threat of a right takeover. Never in the course of the six-day conference was it said that more than in any other State the CPI needed the support of the Congress in West Bengal for realising its ambition to emerge as the second biggest party in the Lok Sabha—a position now occupied by the CPI(M). In no State, far less in West Bengal, will the Congress be willing to yield to the CPI the seats it won in the last parliamentary elections. The constituencies where the Congress lost will be allotted to the CPI which means that in West Bengal the CPI will have to win the seats now held by the CPI(M) to improve upon its performance in

1971. This the CPI cannot hope to bring off without active support of the Congress.

The cake for the biggest hoax goes however to Mr Bejoy Singh Nahar and his associates in the Congress, who have suddenly discovered rampant corruption in the ruling party and its Government in the State. The leading lights of this group had occupied positions of influence in the party and the government in the past, and the implication of their discovery is that corruption is a recent growth in the party. They can fob off none with their talk of a mighty movement to cleanse the party and the Government. The real

reason for their stance is that in the factional fight within the Congress they have been routed. They are cast away of the party, and unless they are able to make their presence felt somehow, they will be totally eliminated in the coming elections. They are trying to ride back to the political stage on the issue of corruption. The pervasive corruption they are bemoaning will disappear the moment they are promised some accommodation in the matter of distribution of Congress nominations. It seems that despite all their differences, apparent or real, all political parties and groups are united in the assumption that the small man in West Bengal is a big fool.

welcomed the appointment of an army officer at Calcutta Corporation, because the workers were not reputed for their sincerity or efficiency. Incidentally, work at the Corporation has not improved at all even after this. But it certainly did at the DVC. The lesson is clear: workers must not give any opportunity to the present administration to effect such appointments any longer and they must be sincere in their dealings with the common people. No one can hold a brief for a shirking, insincere worker.

The alternative is fraught with danger. At the DVC, for instance, workers have already lost some of their democratic rights: they cannot organise rallies or processions, do any postering and the Chairman fixes even the number of people he will meet from an employees' reputation. Unless the working class is alert, it will end up by losing everything.

The Government wants to create some stake in the economy for the army personnel. Every jawan's family is given free land, pension, ration, education and housing, on top of his pay, all of which goes to the bank. The result is the creation of a new armed privileged class, but only in certain chosen areas in the country, like Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar. The relative affluence of some of these States, is attributable to this, among other factors.

## In Civilian Clothes

A correspondent writes:

The Central Government seems determined to inherit the very worst elements of advanced capitalist economies despite its professed socialist aims. It is not difficult to understand the expediency behind such dishonesty. On the one hand, it enables our rulers to maintain a credibility in its relationship with Third World countries and the socialist bloc. On the other, they can assure the capitalist countries that regardless of what may be said in public, they will never compromise on the basic democratic tenets the liberty of the individual and the press, "free" elections, and the free growth of individual enterprise. State control of the economy will be kept at the minimum level of efficiency, so that people lose their faith in official enterprises. What other lesson can be drawn from the experience of the wheat trade takeover, or nationalisation of the coal industry?

Far more alarming, however, are the gradual signs that the foundations of a military-industrial complex are now being laid in this country. In the name of ensuring better production, retired army generals, specially the ones noted for their hard-line approach, have been appointed at the top of several government and semi-government undertakings

in recent months, without much publicity. Among these are the Damodar Valley Corporation, Braithwaite, IISCO, the Heavy Engineering Corporation, and Calcutta Corporation. More such appointments are expected at Heavy Electricals and in at least one major private industrial undertaking. In fact, it has already become customary for retired police chiefs in West Bengal to be re-appointed as administrators of some unit or the other.

Of late, the press has been full of praise and rightly so, for the better generation of power at the DVC. The credit however has been collared by General P.S. Bhagat, the present Chairman of the DVC, because the improvement has been noticed since he took over.

Without wishing to criticise the General dare one suggest that from the beginning to the end, it is the common workers, and not their chiefs, who have done all the work, and therefore deserve at least part of the credit? Of this, there has been no mention in the press.

The situation spells a very clear challenge to the working class. Usually, such appointments have been made on the plea that organisational management needs toning up. In fact, everyone

## An Unholy Nexus

A correspondent writes:

The jute workers' strike provides the latest instance of how the unholy nexus of the capitalists, the trade unionists and the bureaucracy functions in this great land of socialism. Jute mill-owners and exporters, who during the last several months since the oil crisis have vastly fattened their profits, wanted to make a still bigger margin. But somehow the course of events was not going their way. The U.S. economy has suffered a recessionary shock and house-building activity, which determines the demand for carpet backing, has slowed down considerably. With the export duty on carpet backing—recent-

ly reduced by New Delhi—the price of synthetics came to be almost equal to that of jute goods. The American demand for this principal jute goods export item has thus slumped. On the other hand, the demand for another type of jute construction—hessian—has been showing a little more liveliness. So most of the leading mills decided to switch their carpet backing loomage to the manufacture of hessian little caring for the adverse effect it would have on the group interest. But soon they found out the mistake. Carpet backing business was down; the hessian market too was getting weak. So something needs to be done. And the trade unionists and the decision-makers were just waiting for such a call from the jute barons.

The plan that was hatched is remarkably simple. The trade unions would give a strike call in support of some high demands by workers. The mills would turn them down. The Government would call meeting after meeting to resolve the dispute. In this way, some precious days will tick away. Then a compromise formula would be found out. And everybody would be happy. Only the poor farmers who work day in and day out for raising the crop would have no occasion to know how a handful of people have robbed them of their minimum dues, of the morsel of food for them and their families. But who cares? The bureaucrats and the trade unionists would be well off for the service done in the interest of the poor jute workers. And the capitalists will have the big kill. On the one hand, the loss of production during the strike period should help to create a feeling of short supply of jute goods and thus allow prices to be raised. On the other, to the extent mills do not consume raw jute during the strike period, they will have to buy less jute. A short crop this year could have pushed up raw jute prices high, but, thanks to the obliging bigwigs in New Delhi, this has not happened. Now the mills want the fibre prices to be lowered further, and they will have what they are asking for. Capitalists, humanists, socialists of India—unite and kill the farmers and the workers!

## Culture and VIPs

Unlike their Western counterparts Indian scholars, writers and intellectuals cannot be accused of being too self-conscious professionally to care for the views of laymen on their own subjects; most of them are judiciously accommodating if a layman happens to be a Minister or something bigger than that. And unlike their Western counterparts, Indian Ministers, with or without portfolios, or less powerful men of destiny like Governors enjoy illimitable discretionary powers to rush into those cultural and intellectual areas where angels fear to tread. India, the land of unity in diversity for many visionaries, offers here another classic example of that sacred concept: Indian scholars or writers who usually show little tolerance for one another never demur at doing obeisance unitedly to anyone coming from the Cabinet, or Rashtrapati Bhavan or Raj Bhavan. A cultural or academic conference, whatever its name may be, e.g. history congress, or science congress or celebration of a poet's birthday, or a seminar of seminal minds, will remain a non-event until a *deus ex machina* is invoked from those holy places by our so-called self-sufficient pundits. 'But that is only a traditional ritual, nothing more',—one may argue. Granting that it is so, how would one feel if a Minister or his master makes this harmless ritual an occasion for teaching the scholars and writers things of which he is quite innocent?

Recently the Governor of West Bengal, Mr Dias, sought earnestly to teach the historians at a history congress how to dot their i's and cross their t's, and the learned audience, forgetting their usual vanity, gratefully listened to this historical homily from the throne like pupils bent on winning scholarships. At a national convention of writers which was organised by the Authors' Guild of India and inaugurated in Delhi in December by an august personality from the Cabinet, and blessed by the PM's message that was chanted with almost religious reverence. R. K. Narayan is reported to have said that in a land where the politician and the film star dominate the scene, the writer

## Announcement

*We may have to suspend publication after the next issue—for a while. Newsprint sanction has not come through yet from New Delhi, though we applied for it over five months ago.*

Business Manager  
FRONTIER

and his work naturally pass unnoticed. Mr Narayan should have been reminded that the political VIPs are not gate-crashers, they are invited with ceremonious pomp by those writers whose cause he seems to have espoused. Only a few days ago some veteran Bengali poets and intellectuals took part in a symposium in Calcutta on the revolutionary poet Sukanta Bhattacharya, and the whole function was presided over by a Minister who gladly offered the attentive audience what must have struck him as a very illuminating piece of his own literary criticism, his *raison d'être* being probably the fact that he is enthroned somewhere in a building called Writers' Building.

This is not to suggest that a Minister or a higher dignitary of the political pantheon is nothing but a bureaucratic philistine. A Radhakrishnan can and a Nehru could, in spite of an air of pontifical superiority, be quite stimulating intellectually at a literary or scholarly gathering. But most of our scholars and writers, perhaps because of their wallowing in ill-gotten fame and their parasitical dependence on the powers that be, are on the brink of losing all sense of discrimination, and all sense of commitment to their own vocation, not to speak of their commitment to the society they live in.

# Production Policy to Promote Inequality

ASHOK RUDRA

WE have discussed in two articles (December 7 and December 21) how the Government's investment policy and price policy have been such as to accentuate the inequality in the standards of living of different sections of the population. In the present article we shall see how the same policy orientation glaringly reveals itself in the structure of production of commodities meant for the consumption of the rich, the poor and the not-so-poor. It may be borne in mind in this connection that production structure is affected not only by the Government's investment policy and its price policy but also by its industrial import licensing policies. The Government can prevent or encourage certain items of production by issuing licences for the setting up of production units or denying them; by issuing licences for the import of raw materials or capital goods or denying them; by approving of proposals for collaboration agreements with foreign firms or by rejecting them. Even though our economy is overwhelmingly a private sector economy, the Government wields very extensive powers to influence the production structure of the economy through the control it can exercise over capital issues and foreign exchange utilisation. As such the production structure even in the private sector reflects the policy orientation of the Government.

The three basic needs of the poor masses are foodgrains, clothing and housing. As to housing there are hardly any reliable statistics. The majority of the country's poor live in villages as well as in the city slums and there are no indications that their housing conditions have undergone any improvements during the last 20 years or so. As to foodgrains and clothing, it is a staggering fact, not too well known among even professional economists, that the per capita availability of foodgrains and ordinary mill cloth in the early seven-

ties was no higher than it was in the early thirties. A recent study shows that per capita availability of foodgrains was 166.5 kg. per year in 1931-33; it fell to 123 kg. in 1950-52 and then from there it rose in the next 20 years to reach 149 kg. by 1971-72. Similarly, the per capita availability of cotton cloth was in 1931-32 12.4 yards; it fell to 9.9 yards in 1950-52 wherefrom it rose to 12.7 yards in 1971-72. Thus, the increase in the production and supply of these two essential commodities that has taken place during the last 25 years of planned development has only resulted in a recovery of the average standard of living of the masses to what it was in the early thirties. This is consistent with the view that the most important result achieved by our planning has been to arrest and reverse the process of economic decline that was on during several decades preceding the country's independence. The importance of this phenomenon ought not to be minimised. But nor should one minimise the significance of the fact that the average availabilities of foodgrains and cloth after 25 years of planned development are no higher than what they were twenty years before the beginning of planning!

But has there not been any increase in the supply of other consumer goods? If one believes that the living standards of all sections of the population except the monopoly capitalists of the industry sector and the big landowning class in the agriculture sector have either declined or at the best remained where they were, one would expect that increase in the supply and consumption of all consumer goods would rise at the most at the same rate as that of the growth of population. That is because the families of monopoly capitalists are so rich, their consumption levels so high that they can hardly consume any more. They must be hav-

ing more than enough of everything of whatever they may desire, so that increase in their income would not result in any increase in their consumption. The big landowners of course are not so rich; their consumption levels can still rise a great deal; also, they are much more numerous than monopoly capitalists; all the same it will be generally accepted that their consumption needs cannot provide a very large market for the consumer goods industries of the country. The market for certain categories of consumer goods has however expanded, and in certain cases at extraordinarily high rates. Where has this increased production gone? It must have gone into the consumption of certain categories of consumers other than families of monopoly capitalists or big landowners. An examination of the consumer goods industries that have expanded at very high rates would indicate that the living standards have increased, and very considerably, among certain sections of that large, sprawling, ill-defined part of the population that is loosely called the 'middle class', as well as among a small stratum of a labour-aristocracy that has been created among the industrial working class.

An indication of how fast some of the goods used by these sections have gone up is obtained from the rates of expansion of a selected few goods provided in the Table below.

TABLE

1. Refrigerators: Six-fold expansion in the 10 years between 1960-61 and 1970-71.
2. Radios: 35-fold increase in the 20 years between 1950-51 and 1970-71
3. Record players: 37-fold increase in the 5 years between 1965-66 and 1970-71
4. Electric fans: 3-fold increase in the 20 years from 1950-51 to 1970-71
5. Bicycles: 20-fold increase in the 20 years from 1950-51 to 1970-71
6. Sewing machines: 13-fold increase in the 20 years from 1950-51 to 1970-71

7. Scooter and motor cycles: 4-1/2 times increase in the 10 years from 1960-61 to 1970-71
8. Synthetic fibres: 7-fold increase between 1955-56 and 1970-71
9. Detergent (soap powders): 33-fold increase in the 10 years from 1960-61 to 1970-71
10. Fluorescent tubes: More than 10-fold increase between 1958-59 and 1970-71
11. Breakfast foods (corn and wheat flakes): 15-fold increase between 1958-59 and 1970-71
12. Alcoholic drinks: More than six-fold increase between 1958-59 and 1970-71

These selected few represent a very large category of consumer goods that have also characteristically expanded very fast during the post-independence period. Two common characteristics of these goods are:

(a) They do not represent any kind of necessities. They are either luxuries or meant to make life more comfortable for the users.

(b) They are beyond the reach of the poor masses, say 80 per cent of the population.

Economic statisticians have not carried out any studies to find out to what categories of consumers these goods have gone. They work with aggregative figures like total consumption expenditure in money and use corrections for price rises with the help of index numbers. Some of the difficulties of working with expenditure figures expressed in money were mentioned in the article published in the issue of November 30. To this we have to add the cautionary note that the use of index numbers involves various difficulties which are highly intractable. Most of the index numbers are used in such a manner as to suggest that the users are happily unaware of these various serious difficulties. Just to mention one: there are no satisfactory means of correcting money expenditure figures for price changes when

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new items keep on entering into the collection of goods consumed. Use of index numbers for price correction is based on the assumption that the goods consumed remain the same, only their quantities and prices vary. Even in such a simple situation, using a single number to correct for the changes in a large collection of prices to arrive at a measure of how much the consumption of the items has increased in their quantities gives rise to unsolvable difficulties. But what has been happening in India is exactly this phenomenon of living standards rising by a continuous transformation of the nature of the collection of consumer goods going into the consumption of those whose standards are rising. One may challenge that the entry of these new goods does not represent any rise in standards for anybody. But it is difficult to believe that anybody would buy a radio or a record player or a refrigerator or a scooter or even a bicycle or an electric fan by eating less of food or by being less well clad than before. It can be safely assumed that whoever goes into the purchasing of such goods does so only after ensuring the satisfaction of the needs that were satisfied before. Hence increase in the use of such objects does indeed indicate a rise in the standard of living of those who use them. One reason why this phenomenon escapes the attention of economic analysts is that, for them, all these objects appear to be objects of necessity. What is a necessity and what is a luxury is very much relative. Twenty or 30 years back, to have an electric fan in one's home was a symbol of prestige. Refrigerators were even rarer. Nowadays fans are found in most lower middle-class homes and even in many working-class houses. Refrigerators have increasingly penetrated the dining rooms of middle-class families, along with gas cookers and various other kitchen gadgets. Middle class people take such things for granted, even those who do not have the means to possess them: for them they look like minimum targets that they aspire to reach. It should be emphasised that the transformation of the consumption basket does not involve only the few things presented in the Table.

Any visit to the market cannot but impress upon the observer the extremely large range of things that have come to have a place in the consumption pattern of middle-class consumers. In the food stores one cannot but be impressed by the importance that semi-processed, packed and tinned food items have come to acquire in the eating habits of the middle-class. Masala has given place to powdered masala. Indigenous drinks like sarbat and green cocoanut water have been largely substituted by such things as coca-cola and Pepsi-cola (which pernicious objects have made a cultural conquest of the world, ranging from remote rural areas of India to the exclusive hotels of socialist world capitals like Moscow). The serving of alcoholic drinks while entertaining guests has become almost a social norm. It is difficult to believe that those who have switched over to these alternatives have done so while undergoing a cut in their standards of living.

This phenomenon represents an increase in inequality, because the rise in living standards indicated by this changed pattern of consumption is restricted to certain sections of the population who are not among the poorer masses. It would be a safe bet that the poorer 80 per cent of the population have not been affected by this transformation of the consumer goods market. Also, not all sections of the loosely defined middle class have improved their living standards but only certain sections. This increased inequality, involving not just more of consumption of the same goods consumed by the poor, but altogether involving different things, has widened the gap that separates these sections of the middle class from the masses. It would appear that it has been a deliberate policy of the Government to see to it that this gap widens, that sections of the middle class get increasingly alienated from the masses.

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# Alternatives Before Bangladesh

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

THE third anniversary celebration on December 16, of independence was bizarre theatre, a 'day of discord', or (as one Dacca weekly put it), 'A Festival of Defiance'. All the glamour of the liberation struggle, all the signs of national unity seem to have been buried. Today there is only discord—either silent or violent. The people in general 'demonstrated' their mood through abstention. There were hardly any flags or patriotic symbols in Dacca; the capital was patrolled and kept under military 'thumbs' by the guardians of the ruling power (the para-military forces of the Rakkhi Bahini). Meanwhile, the countryside showed a picture of revolt: there the cadres of the 'black power' of Siraj Sikdar's East Bengal Proletarian Party showed their armed strength.\*

December 16 was thus 'highlighted' by bombings and terrorist activities directed against the ruling power of Sheikh Mujib's Government and against the supposed domination by 'expansionist India'. Like year ago, the party of Siraj Sikdar had called for a general strike. With far more success than last year, it enforced its call, through the use of violence. Several railway stations were burnt down, police stations were raided, and bombs and molotov cocktails were hurled at various public places. At least outside the capital of Dacca, life temporarily came to a halt.

In a major pamphlet spread in preparation for what was called a 'black day', a political programme was announced. Siraj Sikdar's the East Bengal Proletarian Party, the East Bengal National Liberation Front and the East Bengal Armed Patriotic Forces (in order of apparent importance), called for the resignation of the Awami League Government and the formation of a 'national democratic government'—to some extent a replica of the demand of most

opposition parties in Bangladesh at present. Sikdar and his armed allies, however, proposed their own 18-point programme, which included land reform, nationalisation of black money, and reform of the armed forces.

From the beleaguered city of Dacca, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addressed himself to the nation. Seldom was a ruler in a more embarrassing situation. Mujib now is completely alienated from 'my people'. In the rising wave of criticism the 'Father of the Nation' has not escaped the charges of corruption and robbery.

In this delicate situation Mujib on the one hand tried to save his own skin and to escape from the negative judgment of the masses, and on the other hand joined in the choir of opposition voices. Attempting to impress his audience with the 'results' of three years of Awami League rule, Mujib stated: "It was only three years from 1971 to 1974. It is true I told you that I shall not be able to give you anything during those years. But despite that, so far as giving is concerned it was not altogether empty". This 'violent' denial of the general crisis situation in the country was as remarkable as the way in which the Father pointed accusingly to what he called the 'main enemies': "the gang of smugglers, black-marketeers, profiteers and bribe takers",—"beasts in the garb of men who are depriving the poor and starving people of food through smuggling and hoarding".

In a sense Mujib's speech was remarkable, for he could not ignore the forces which threaten to overthrow his government and the system of exploitation which he represents. Apparently referring to the party of Siraj Sikdar, he lashed out at a 'hardful of miscreants whose main prop is to create terror under the cover of darkness". On the other hand, he made a vague effort to dismiss the JSD as a group of "sentimental idealists kicking up a storm of speeches and statements".

On Tuesday some 50 young men came in taxis and raided *Darpan*. They ransacked the office, destroyed papers, furniture and the telephone, and beat up two employees. They damaged the only typewriter *Frontier* has.

Finally, one wonders what is the objective base for the rosy spectre of a bright future which Mujib pictured at the end of his 'national speech'. In fact, Mujib's speech as well as the events of December 16 were a clear manifestation of the tremendous social conflict which has overtaken all national feelings.

After the famine which has caused the death of several hundreds of thousands of people, the social conflict is wide in the open. The cause of the famine are so manifestly human and political in character—primarily the strangulating economic activities of traders and hoarders—that even the less politically conscious peasants now seem to be aware of them.

The balance of the famine, which by the middle of December was gradually disappearing in the background of a rich winter harvest, is a large disruption of social life. According to unofficial reports, about one hundred thousand changes in landownership have been registered. Many peasants (as for instance in the northern subdivision of Kurigram) did not have any choice but to sell their standing crop for negligible amounts of money. Poor peasants without cattle, exhausted day labourers, wandering unemployed, and starving beggars, all wonder what will be their future.

The Government recently announced both stern anti-smuggling measures and a policy of forced procurement. However, the necessary cooperation of the people is largely absent, and moreover the Government seems to be more skilled in terrorising the people than in evolving rational economic policies.

The general sentiment is that the Government of the Awami League should be replaced by a 'national government'. At least this is what most constitutional as well as underground

\* This article was written before the proclamation of 'emergency' and the killing of Sikdar.

opposition parties have been calling for since October-November. Aside from the question of whether sufficient constitutional political forces could be mustered for such a national government, contradictions within society already seem to have sharpened to the point where national conciliation is impossible without a violent clash, a social upheaval.

### 'Permanent crisis'

Bangladesh today is in a kind of "permanent crisis", and the urgent question is only whether a truly revolutionary 'political line' is emerging or will do so in the near future. In the last few months there has been a gradual upsurge in the struggle of the masses—hunger demonstrations, attacks on police outposts, hartals like the ones on November 26 (called by the JSD) and on December 16 (imposed by Siraj Sikdar's party), and numerous clashes between the Rakkhi Bahini (the para-military forces) and guerilla groups. It is apparent that there is a large potential for revolutionary action.

Consequently, we should take a fresh look at the state of the left-wing parties and the Marxist-Leninist factions.

Spectacular actions and sensational appeals (like the sparks of Sikdar's East Bengal Proletarian Party) may not be a correct measuring rod for the solidity and strength of various radical leftist groups. Still, the 'traditional' Marxist-Leninist factions in Bangladesh (like those of Matin and Alauddin, of Abdul Haq, and of the one under the joint leadership in the name of Mohammed Toaha) remain, it seems, ossified and confused. Until recently at least, pamphlets spread by the faction of Matin and Alauddin were based completely on Charu Mazumdar's line, and Abdul Haq still calls his faction 'East Pakistan Communist Party', ignoring the existing political reality.

It is widely known that the movement which the faction of Matin and Alauddin tried to speak off in Atrai (Raishahi district) based on the 'annihilation line' dismally failed to get popular support. Abdul Haq's faction in a different way tried to spearhead a revolt against the petty landlords (jotedars) in 1973 through the seizing of the harvest and its division among the

poor peasants. The party, now supposedly led jointly by Sukhendu Das-tidar, Toaha and Ashabuddin, makes occasional press statements, but it is doubtful whether it has been able to organise anything beyond secret faction cells.

The East Bengal Proletarian Party led by Sikdar (EBPP) and the JSD ('National Socialist Party') have both roots in the liberation struggle of 1971 against the Pakistani army, both have a strong national organisational network, both recently have called for a general strike to demand the resignation of Sheikh Mujib's discredited Government, and both have been distrusted by the 'traditional' China-oriented factions in the proletarian movement of Bangladesh. But this is where the comparison ends, for the strategies of both parties vary strongly, in fact are in many ways opposites.

In a simplified way one could identify the line of the EBPP as 'terrorist' armed opposition, and the JSD's the popular spontaneous line. Whereas in the past both streams were looked upon with distrust by leftist intellectuals, the party of Sikdar by now clearly has won in controversiality, in particular since Mujib's Government is focusing attention on this party by flashing many of its terrorist activities (e.g. through news reports in the daily **Ittefaq**).

However, in spite of its strong terrorist leanings, the EBPP does not lack proletarian support altogether. In some regions of Bangladesh—e.g. in Munshiganj thana (Dacca district) and in Nandail (Mymensingh) the party has (temporarily?) established its hegemony and seems to enjoy the sympathy of the poor peasants. It is reported that in these regions the party has divided harvested rice amongst poor, starving peasants. In the area of Munshiganj, just on the other side of the Dhaleshwari river near Dacca, the armed squads of Siraj Sikdar's party have stubbornly resisted murderous onslaughts of the terrorising Rakkhi Bahini. Thus, more than any other faction, the EBPP symbolises the crumbling of the power of the Awami League Government, and of the fact that the ruling class of Bangla-

desh is losing its grip over the countryside.

### JSD

However, to obtain an insight in the evolution of Bangladesh politics, one has to take a look at the JSD and the changes which this party has undergone during the last year or so. After two years of transformation, the party now unmistakably has moved to the left of the political spectrum.

The watershed in the party's history was the bloody Sunday of March 17 when a procession led by the president of the party, Major Jalil, was ravaged with bullets from truckloads of Rakkhi Bahini—the cruel defenders of the disorder of the Awami League Government. Thus ended a chapter in which the JSD as a newborn party (formed in October-November 1972) had voiced the disappointment of the urban middle classes, and of the students and the young in the town; the period of 'emotional mass appeal' of the party, had passed.

After the bloodshed on March 17, the JSD underwent an internal transformation. Due to the violence of the ruling class, the masses (temporarily at least) deserted. In addition to the several dozens of casualties on March 17, Government 'pogroms' resulted in the arrest and detention of many leaders and cadres everywhere in the country. The crippled party went largely underground.

What happened to the internal composition of the JSD? Many opportunistic elements which until March had found a convenient shelter within the party left. The party discarded its belief in a democratic road towards 'social revolution' in Bangladesh. Some observer has commented that formerly 'they had expected the bastion of the Awami League to collapse like the walls of Jericho'. This kind of misplaced self-confidence has

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gone. The leaders of the JSD expressed self-criticism in a major statement to the revolutionary underground.

The end of the period of mass movements in the towns formed the beginning of serious mass work amongst the peasantry. Cadres were sent to the villages to politicise the rural poor. And radical, but hitherto empty, slogans were supplemented with programmes and analyses which may not necessarily indicate a serious commitment to socialism, but certainly testify to a large degree of political maturity.

'March 17' was not only a watershed in the history of the JSD. For other reasons too it may turn out to be the most important political event in post-independence Bangladesh. Politics in general seem to have undergone a qualitative change. An era of one particular kind of politics seems to have ended—the era of the spontaneous mass movements centred in the towns and around the middle classes as the sole focus of the country's politics.

Two pillars seem to constitute the foundation of the JSD, namely nationalism and non-communalism. On the one hand, what eventually became the JSD was formerly the national wing of the Awami League, which pushed the struggle for independence forward. Secondly, the stream which now forms the JSD has contributed to making socialism a publicly accepted issue, thus establishing a heavy counterweight to communalism.

This last factor, its significance, should not be underrated by the underground Marxist-Leninist factions in Bangladesh. Under present conditions when the peasants are facing tremendous distress, and when the revolutionary forces have not yet established really firm roots among the peasantry, communalism could easily be revived. Peasants might turn back in glorification of the Pakistani Muslim past, instead of looking forward to a socialist future.

A number of points emerge from a reading of JSD documents. As far as the 'principal contradiction' is concerned, the JSD's leaders are of the opinion that the internal class contradiction (between the merchants and the rising bourgeois, on the one hand and the

masses of the exploited workers and peasants on the other hand) is the principal one. Secondly, as far as the 'mode of production' in agriculture is concerned, the JSD states squarely that Bangladesh's agriculture in essence is 'capitalist' (or 'backward-capitalist') in character. The thesis may tend to overlook feudal remnants, and may tend to lose sight of the strong traditional features of Bangladesh' agriculture (petty commodity production dominated by merchants and commercial exploitation). The stage of revolution is defined as 'socialist'—a proposition which is more convincing as a negation of the 'bourgeois-democratic' and 'national-democratic' lines of various underground, Marxist-Leninist factions, than as an internally coherent thesis.

A clear understanding of the stage of revolution can be reached only by looking both at 'primary', analytical, aspects (questions such as the principal contradiction and the mode of production) and also at other, derivative ones (questions of revolutionary strategy, such as the question of leadership, and the alliance to be forged). The JSD may not yet have resolved all these questions correctly. But the non-sectarian outlook of the party, and the apparent modesty of leadership with regard to its own contribution towards the proletarian movement in Bangladesh, may provide favourable conditions. On the other hand, there is reason for continued doubts regarding the intentions of the leadership of the JSD. Even now there are rumours that Mujibur Rahman still has links with his former allies. Contradictions remain between the revolutionary dialectics of the leaders of the JSD in their words, and the apparent absence of a revolutionary backbone (vanguard party + people's army). Although there are some post-revolution programme, a clear strategy for an armed uprising is lacking. And so is a well-disciplined core of cadres, in contradistinction from Siraj Sikdar's party.

The proletarian movement in Bangladesh urgently awaits the emergence of a correct political line. What is needed now is a general summing up of the experiences so far, and the formation of a line which will integrate the most

crucial tasks of the moment: the sharpening of the class consciousness of the peasantry, the organisation of the broad masses of cultivators (through a 'village government'), and the creation of a mobile guerilla army complementary to the village militia.

At present Bangladesh's soil is extremely fertile for a violent revolution. After three years of misrule by the Awami League, the discord, the social conflict, has come widely into the open. The peasants of Bangladesh are yearning to be organised on the basis of a programme which truly represents their basic interests.

Meanwhile, the proletarian movement is evolving. While there is still extreme dividedness and general confusion, there clearly are signs of growing maturity. In fact, it is the industrial workers who 'are leading the way.' All the five opposition labour organisations of Bangladesh recently have joined together to form a National Labour Action Committee (NLAC). The NLAC already has called upon all workers of the country to observe 'Labour Protest Day' on January 18 and 19, on the basis of a short-term and 'perspective' programme formulated by the NLAC. The significance of unity of the workers' organisations can hardly be overstressed. History's course seems inevitable.

(Rectification: In the article "Western Aid to Bangladesh" (December 14, 1974) the name of the Jatyo Shromik Federation was mistakenly mentioned in connection with the activities of the representatives of the AFL-CIO in Bangladesh. It should be "Sanyukto Mazdoor Federation").

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# Literary Conference

AN OBSERVER

For All Seasons She

S. I. K.

THE All India Bengali Literary Conference at Agartala is over after a three-day colourful programme. The conference was mainly financed by the Tripura Government which thereby proved again its profound love for the Bengali language which is already an official language. All the top officials of the administration also became culture-mongers showing their taste for art and literature to a high degree. Approximately 400 delegates from different corners of the country attended the conference but most of the big shots Bengali culture were absent, probably because Tripura is a remote locality where scotch and champagne are not in abundant supply. At Government initiative nearly Rs. 7 lakhs was collected, a major portion of which came from unlicensed wine traders and smugglers.

Of the delegates, one newspaper editor, known as "the friend of Tripura" devoted his energies to increasing the circulation of his dailies and other periodicals and collecting government advertisement while a well-known writer persuaded some big shots of the administration to include his books in the syllabus for schools and colleges.

The Chief Minister, who inaugurated the conference in style, boastfully reminded people that he had introduced Bengali as an official language (thereby obliging the past monarchs who were patrons of Bengali culture. Mean-

while a few Tripuri tribals of Agartala passed in a procession "shouting "Recognise 'Kokborok' (the tribal language) at all levels", "Make Kokborok our medium of instruction."

It is worth mentioning that the right of more than seven lakh Tripura tribals to foster their own culture and language is totally denied by the Tripura Government. The local upstarts of Bengali culture are always proud of the past feudal monarchs who recognised Bengali as the official language, throwing 'Kokborak' out. They are also proud that Rabindranath wrote plays and novels in eulogy of the kings. This tradition is faithfully maintained by the present rulers. It is painful that the Tripura tribals are denied their right to their mother tongue as the medium of instruction in institutions. One also remembers the cruel reality in the life of the tribals—about 100,000 tribals in Raina region were evicted by the CRP and Border Military Police from their lands which they had made cultivable by prolonged effort in the face of many natural calamities. In the name of horticulture the Government has been evicting them from their ancestral lands. The Government gave wide publicity to "Tribal Development" at the exhibition arranged on the occasion of the Literary Conference. Thousands of starving tribals of Tripura were brought from remote areas of darkness to the town to witness their "progress". Agartala town is always kept festive. There are many items of joulush like conferences, exhibitions and such other things of the Great Indira Circus. At one of the stalls exhibiting pictures of development and progress of certain tribal areas in Tripura, two naked Tripuris saw the examples of their progress. One Bengali poet championed in poetic language the cause of uplift of the tribal culture in Tripura. But the reality is that the conference was no less circustic than the Great Indira Circus in the town today.

CHOU En-lai is reported to have described Nehru as "impossible to negotiate with, being both unreliable and impenetrable". Nearly the same epithets were used about Mrs G by the old Congress stalwarts "sacked like potatoes" by her. And having worked with her they should know. She continues to baffle them and enjoys wearing an enigmatic smile, they think, for their discomfiture. Her studious rectitude gives her deadly advantage over her opponents. They fret and fulminate, spout steam and speculate, and in sheer desperation, berate her. She remains unflapped, secure in power, supreme in hereditary majesty, comforting herself with grace feminine. Or feline?

Thus from crisis to crisis she stalks and strides as the saviour of the dumb millions. To wear this mantle with aplomb she has to be the victor. This makes her confident that she is India, she is democracy, she is freedom, she is the hope of the masses, "the sentinel of civilisation", and, for the elites in dither at the prospect of the masses rejecting the Kirtan-Bhajan Mandali called the Indian Parliament and experimenting with other models and other mores, she is the 'viable alternative within the parameters of the parliamentary model'. Viewed from any angle she is an indispensability.

The kite-flying about a snap poll started months ago. Now it has shrunk to the relevant size—when. While they are yet betting on if it will be held or when it will be held, they are in a huff to rig up a sort of combined opposition to her. And having ordered the delimitation of constituencies months ago, she wouldn't abide the question still. Uncannily through the sixth sense, she keeps her options open and her secrets to herself. By the time the speculative frenzy has spent itself out elections would seem to be the most natural event and the eagerly awaited outlet for accumulated tensions and excitements.

Any election, snap or substantive, she will win hands down. Elections in de-

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mocracies are fought to be won, albeit, by the rulers. To this extent the parliamentary model accommodates the wishes of the ruling clique. Even without rigging. And rigging is by now established to be within rights for the democrats. The votes will flock flying to her. Just for the reason that she has something for every palate to savour, every eye to be enraptured with. Here is a small inventory. It can be enlarged by the more knowledgeable.

For those who like India to assume her legitimate role as a major Asian power, and not let things slip by default as in Tibet—and their number is legion—she has Sikkim towed to our democracy.

Those crying themselves hoarse over the price spiral can derive some comfort from this being a world phenomenon which she, in all conscience, all will agree, would not and should not, let alone could not, disturb. Then prices in India tend to fall at the prospect of elections. For this reason alone let there be elections all round the year to arrest the spurt in prices. Who can defy this logic?

For those believing that Bharatmata can wail well only in Hindi there is the World Hindi Meet in Nagpur. It is not idle to imagine that soon there would be any number of sponsors and supporters in the UN to see Hindi seated as the language of the largest democracy in Asia, and the second largest in the world, after, of course, the USA.

For those carping at the economic offenders getting away with their perfidy there is the regular roll call of some arrested smugglers and tax-evaders. A good number have been let off, others will be set free just after the elections. If you believe in the fundamental rights of private citizens you will plump for the elections being held sooner than later so that infractions of civic freedoms don't get prolonged. This suits everyone fine i.e. the offenders and their political bosses. Where do the masses come in this racket? They are necessary to lap up the loud media lollipop of propaganda on AIR and in the kept Press.

For those not knowing what to do with their excess money there are now the cars to buy—all controls gone, cushy air travel, direct dialling of telephone, increased allocation for space

research and TV sets, etc., etc.

This is only a rough and ready sampling of her domestic repertoire. What of the foreign front? See the plethora of trade and culture pacts India has been signing non-stop these several months. The outstanding settlement with Portugal over Goa is the latest among her solid achievements.

#### A Surprise or Two

And even here she is quite capable of throwing a surprise or two. A move in the direction of some understanding with China should not be discounted as too wild a conjecture. Like some sarkari sadhus catering for her spiritual needs, she has her channels to China open, though not running, through a political sadhu stationed free for years in a New Delhi bungalow. He is the Home Ministry's consultant on political sufferers, and the External Affairs Ministry's aide vis-a-vis China. The Chinese Embassy regularly dumps heaps of literature at his place, he has no time to open the packets. Some Gandhians identifying Mao and Gandhi frequent the resort of the mini-Mahatma. And yet, if you start an India-China Friendship Association, you are inviting harrowing police interrogation and regular surveillance. All this will puzzle the simple-minded, but she is unaccountable. Thus when rapprochement with China comes, while it will assert her to be equidistant from both the USA and the USSR and affirm India's freedom to manoeuvre in her national interest, some radicalism too will rub off on to her image as a world leader from this association. Who will grudge her, or India, this long deferred consummation? But, let us remember, this bonanza will be her personal triumph and not in pursuit of a State policy or consistent principle of neighbourly amity. In these haze of halo thus raised, carefully and cautiously, who will look for the correlates between her personal ends and State means? And who will not have forgotten, and forgiven, the thousands dead from starvation, smallpox, torture in police lock-ups and jails, thousands rendered destitute and prostitutes for the glory of Bharati democracy which is at par with the luxury living of the new oligarchs?

## Of Games and Gamesters

GYAN KAPUR

**P**EACEFUL co-existence, which Comrade Khrushchev sold a wondering world, never had a bigger market than in India. But it is invading spheres of which its champion never dreamt. The idea is now going into the grassroots of Indian life. The mixed economy, of course, is a cardinal principle of State policy; but it is the newer manifestations which prove that our Government is determined to be all things to all people.

Hard-to-get telephone connections have for long been changing hands illegally on payment of varying rates of black money and something to grease the palms of the telephone people. But the telephones remained in the names of the original subscribers. And the Posts and Telegraphs Department itself gained nothing out of the transfer. Now all that is changed by the new rules and people are openly selling and buying telephone connections like any other piece of property and even advertising them. The new P & T Rules have made this possible. We can't blame the Government for trying to get a little money when they can't stop the illegal transfer. But why stop there? There are a host of possibilities for the Governments, at the Centre and in the States, and for other Government and semi-Government organisations. And the idea might even catch on in commercial organisations too.

We have the public sector and private sector; levy rice and free rice; levy sugar and free sugar, and so on and so forth. And now the free telephones. By extending the principle to more and more spheres, the Government could really kill two birds with one stone. The coffers of the Government could be filled up and at the same time corruption and nepotism could be rooted out and thus the ground cut out from under the feet of Shri Jaya Prakash Narayan. The possibilities are innumerable; but we can suggest a few.

Vacancies for jobs should be treated just like commodities and divided into two categories—free and levy. The levy vacancies which can be kept at

25% of the total are to be left for the really unfortunates of society. The free vacancies will be sold off to the highest bidders. In this way the money now paid to different people for getting a job will go wholly to the Government, increasing its income considerably. The contract of service should stipulate that all bribes offered to the Government servant must be paid into the Treasury. Out of this, 50%, free of tax, will be returned to the servant who collects the amount and thus helps the Government. As for the levy jobs, these should be filled strictly by lottery to avoid anyone doing any favouritism or taking any bribes.

The same principle can be followed for seats in schools and colleges and for examinations. The students can either pay for a seat in the school or college and then again for the certificate; or they can buy coupons for the lottery to try their luck. What could be fairer?

To do away with all political squabbles, a healthy convention should be established that all MLAs and MPs have the right to become ministers. Not only that, it would be their duty to do

their stint as Ministers for a fixed period by rotation. In time this can be extended to the posts of Chief Minister and Prime Minister which will rotate between the leaders of the different parties. Being in this party or that will cease to have any relevance for parliamentarians. Not being government servants, the rules as suggested in the preceding paragraph would not apply to MLAs and MPs. But Government would gratefully accept, in part or whole any sums which might be paid by an appreciative public for their services. Apart from tax benefits for an equal amount, various awards of titles would be made, depending upon the amounts collected.

These are only a few suggestions. In spite of the brain drain, there is no dearth of talent in the country and fresh and more ingenious ideas will come up. But why try to stop the scientists and doctors from going out of the country, when we cannot put them to any use over here? Why not make a free pool of them and let them go where they want? Only they should hand over to the Government say 25% of their overseas pay as the fee for being citizens of a free country.

enough, he has kept no records of what he has sold, no photographs or copies. How one, who is so methodical in keeping accounts of the works of folk artists, can be so callous about his own record, is beyond comprehension. It is this self-effacing quality that endears him to all.

Sen spoke calmly but there was conviction in what he said. The problem of modern Indian artists is that they are not able to find any roots in society, not able to be relevant. If art does not have any roots, it tries to find its way into rich people's drawing rooms with its tail hanging down. The rich in India are also rootless and have no culture or depth. They ape the superficial smart side of the West and think themselves cultured. If artists have to depend on these people, can they really be creative, deep or original? In the field of art, the country is trying to mimick what has happened in the West in the last fifty years. For this reason the artists can now handle non-indigenous material with a certain amount of competence, but much of what has been produced will be mowed down ruthlessly by the scythes of time. Artists are always fashion-conscious like rich ugly ladies. On the one hand, the willingness of artists to do something original has evaporated to the extent of their having no personal styles. On the other hand, the Indian artistic heritage has been thrown overboard to accommodate the tradition of Euro-American art of the last half century. What remains of traditional Indian art is rather romantic and narrow-nationalistic and therefore pseudo-traditional. Of late some traditional and some Westernised artists are trying hard to find a kind of disguise which would attract foreign buyers. These artists have not been inspired by the life around them or their inner vision, but by motives that are purely commercial.

"From what I have said above it may seem that I am a pessimist. But I do not think I am. I believe that the inherent nature of art is to reflect the contemporary social conditions. The confusion of contemporary art reflects the confused state of mind that the most influential and powerful segment of society—the neo-rich and the so-called elites—suffer from. From that angle Indian

## Artists of West Bengal—XIV

SANDIP SARKAR

### Prabhash Sen

**Biographical Data:** Born 1919, Nagoan, East Bengal (now Bangladesh). 1937-38 two years in Government College of Arts, Calcutta. 1941 Diploma from Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan with specialisation in sculpture under Ramkinkar Baiz. 1947-49 Paris. Studying sculpture, ceramics and bronze. 1950-53 Worked two years as art teacher in Bombay and Dehra Dun. Had his own studio in Bombay and Calcutta. 1953 Joined All India Handicrafts Board, Regional Design Centre, Calcutta. 1974 Joined Visva-Bharati as Director, Department of Rural Reconstruction, Santiniketan.

**Exhibitions:** Yet to have a one-man show. Exhibited with Sarbari Raychoudhury, Paritosh Sen, Mohim Roodra

and Bijon Chaudhuri twice in the late sixties, plus major group exhibitions in India and abroad. 1973 Exhibited with Calcutta Painters (he is the President of this group) in Bombay. Married, has two sons and a daughter.

### The Interview

Sen is soft-spoken and friendly but very strong in his beliefs. He is busy and is always trying to do something for the Dokra and other metal craftsmen and folk artists. It is his selfless labour that has revived interest in folk art and artists of the Eastern region. Others wrote books but he organised the artists, made sure they got money and material and arranged shows and sales for their finished products. In between this he has found time to sculpt. Strangely

art today reflects this confusion. I also believe that when the industrial revolution is complete, (if it ever is — this would need a drastic overhaul of society), the artists will be articulate enough to creatively reflect the total situation in depth and artistic terms”.

### His Art

Prabhash Sen could have been one of the most influential sculptors of this period had he been more methodical in keeping a record of his work and exhibiting regularly.

However, the younger generation of sculptors have kept in touch with him and his work. As he was trained by Ramkinkar and Benodebehari, he has been able to imbibe the best of both. Sculpture is, as Sen pointed out, a very expensive art and cannot survive without popular support and official patronage. But Sen had never to live by his sculpture, so his work is free from the commercial clichés that mar the work of so many of his contemporaries. As a student he has studied in Europe, but in his work he looks for the grace and grandeur of ancient Indian sculpture as a point of departure. He believes that tradition is something that can be reviewed and renewed according to the necessities of the time.

Like his contemporary in Santiniketan, Sankho Chaudhuri, he has also tried to steer clear of the influence of Ramkinkar, and this has forced both to utilise static forms instead of dynamic ones. They have both avoided drama. In his earlier period, men and women are individuals who belong to society. So they never seem to be forlorn or lonely. He has carefully depicted them when they are alone, within themselves, silent and wistful. They assume their humanness without thinking about it.

He has not depended on classical sculpture alone but has gone to the simplicity of form of the folk artists. He is taken in by construction and has always experimented with the balancing of mass. He has the sinuousness of ancient sculptors. His men and women are normal people who accept life and its vagaries without being vulgar or sensualists. Particularly striking are his

women who have beautiful bodies and stand gracefully in normal everyday postures. He has studied the essential quality of volume by the suspension of rhythm. His portraits are of men who have calmly weathered storms and are philosophical. Most of them are mature people and look back on life with a tender sadness.

Recently he has taken to depicting scenes that are relevant and stark in their ferocity. One can meditate on the formal structure of these sculptures, but the thematic side has been so well integrated that it will be hard to stop just there. His woman rice 'Smuggler', formally very suggestive and strong,

has her stories of woe written in bold lines on her face. The beast of 'Violence' is seen mauling its prey and there is a rugged starkness that frightens. His three people returning 'After Work' on a bus are not frustrated so much as tired and bored. In fact there is no bus, but three people who hang to an imaginary rod inside the bus. They wear their everyday shirts and trousers. They represent the urban people who have lost their identity, but who hope they have not lost the struggle.

Prabhash Sen has possibly taken the right departure in trying to be relevant and younger sculptors might take the cue from him.

## The Mechanisation of Play

DOUGLAS LUMMIS

A visit to the toy section of a department store in Tokyo is a visit to Futu-  
reland. On all sides one is surrounded by the buzzing, clacking, and whirring of bright plastic machines which automatically climb, whirl, walk jump, and crawl.

But behind this festive spectacle is a less festive reality. As Japanese urban life becomes increasingly hostile to children's play, the toy industry seeks to turn this fact to its advantage by introducing increasingly complex (and increasingly expensive) automatic toys designed for use inside the house. The growing invasion of this form of toy into the child's world projects a revolution in the value of play itself.

Take, for example, Tokyo. There are few open spaces left in this city of ten million, and it takes literally hours by train to get past the last suburbs to true countryside. Nature has been virtually abolished from its centre; the few trees that remain are no longer enough to support bird and insect life. For many children, "nature" takes the form of potted plants, canaries in cages, goldfish in bowls.

The changed environment takes its toll in ignorance. It is reported that when a class of primary school children was asked to draw a chicken, some of the resulting pictures had two legs, some

had four, but most had three. A young woman told me that when she took her nephew to the countryside, he was astounded to discover a beetle on a tree trunk than in a department store: since the old children's summer pastime of insect-gathering has become impossible in the city, a new insect industry has appeared.

There is no place where a child can run. The streets were not built to accommodate cars which now race down them, forcing pedestrians to escape into doorways and hide behind telephone poles. Everywhere police posters instruct mothers never to let go of their child's hand while outside.

Bicycle riding—one of the things children here love most—is forbidden by many schools, which means that the children now search for places where they can ride their bikes covertly, undiscovered by the school authorities. Some children pedal in endless circles on the side walk around their apartment building, their repetitive motion taking on the neurotic rhythm of caged animals.

Like all countries, Japan has had a special child's culture, with traditional toys, games, stories, and songs handed down from the misty past. At its simplest level, play was profoundly educational in that it was a re-enactment of the fundamental steps by which human

beings build and maintain culture. A boy who wished to make a *takeum*, a would take an object out of nature (a stick of bamboo), apply work, learning, and imagination to it, and produce a humanised object of culture—a toy-horse. A girl who wished to play *ofedama* would first learn how to make the bean bags from her grandmother, and hear in the process stories of her grandmother's childhood, and how she in turn learned how to make the bean-bags from her grandmother. Children who wished to play street games had to learn how to organise themselves, establish rules, deal with contingencies and social conflict.

The toy companies have an entirely different notion of how play should be carried on. Of course electric cars and trains and walking robots have been around for years, but these a child could at least aim. Typical of the new mentality of the top companies are the endless variations on the theme of the little electric tramcar which twists and turns slowly along a plastic track. It can only be assembled in one way, and to touch it is to break it. It is entirely self-sufficient, and does not require any activity whatsoever on the part of the child. It is a toy that plays with itself.

In the world projected by these toy manufacturers, play means the act of watching a machine operate. It is difficult to predict what effect this mode of play, supplemented by endless hours of watching television, will have on children's consciousness. Hitherto, play has always been a form of activity: for play to occur, the child had to do something.

But in this dense and intensely organised and supervised city, the space for doing is rapidly evaporating. Doing implies randomness, and randomness implies danger. Thus at school the child's work and play is supervised by teachers (some schools forbid soccer, for example, as being "too dangerous"); the walk to and from school is supervised by "Green Auntie" traffic safety volunteers; and life at home is supervised by parents, by television, and by the toys themselves. With the mechanical tramcars, the child's activity is not only unneces-

sary, it is interference. The only change the toy admits of is breakage.

We are often told by cheerful futurologists how in the coming "post-industrial society" the dreary world of the work ethic will give way to a wondrous new world based on the spirit of play. But this is small comfort if it turns out that the true spirit of play—creativity—is a reflection of the element of creativity in work. If so, then the further mechanisation and alienation of work would be accompanied by the further mechanisation and alienation of play. Rather than being an escape from mechanisation into the world of imagination, play would be transformed into the very training ground in which the imagination itself is mechanised.

But children are not so easily defeated. As all parents know, when toys admit of no other form of alteration, children smash them and dream up new games out of the shattered pieces... despite the fact that this violates the rules and invites punishment. It is quite possible that the urge to Complete Supervision will backfire and that, instead of becoming training in obedience, play will emerge as a kind of guerilla warfare in defence of the imagination.

## Letters

### Naxalbari and Telengana

Mr Satindra Bhaumik (December 28) has unmasked a 'Herr Duhring' in me with the help of a printer's devil in my article (Autumn Number) and charges me with making 'fantastic claims about the doings of the lower middle class'. The relevant sentence with a printer's devil is:

"Before 1947 it was the lower middle class which took an initiative in organising the peasantry's class battle against landlords than they took against the anti-national bourgeoisie". (emphasis was added). In my manuscript, the sentence runs as follows: 'Before 1947 it was the lower middle class which took less initiative in organising the peasantry's class battle against landlords than they took against the anti-national

bourgeoisie'. Then I did continue (as has been printed): 'Again it took much less initiative against the Indian bourgeoisie serving the cause of imperialist exploitation than it took against the British rule'.

Here I was pointing out the limitations and weaknesses of middle-class leadership of working-class and peasant movements in India and hence it was far from making 'fantastic claims about the doings of the lower middle class' as alleged by Mr Bhaumik. His pedagogy about 'national revolution' and 'democratic revolution' is totally uncalled for.

In reply to the question raised by Mr Malay Mukhopadhyay I would like to point out that in the relevant portions of my article (comparing Telengana with Naxalbari) I was concerned with the difference between the nature of the impact (on Indian counter-revolution) those events produced. I did never mean that Naxalbari was superior to Telengana in the form of struggle. In Telengana counter-revolution did adopt the policy of military encirclement and annihilation of the revolutionary forces. In the case of Naxalbari, it is true that a similar—if not more brutal—military policy was adopted but with a political line which is of a completely different character. This was because, the objective as well as the subjective situations of the Naxalbari period became considerably explosive at the time Naxalbari took place, indeed Naxalbari did spread like wild fire throughout India, whereas Telengana was local. Telengana was, on the one hand, an identification of the revolutionary Indian peasant challenging the limitations bestowed upon them by the Tebhaga movement. On the other hand, Telengana was the culmination of the fire of revolution nurtured by the Tebhaga movement. Telengana in this sense was both a negation of the Tebhaga form and an expression of positive forces of revolution gathering under the Tebhaga movement.

Naxalbari identified revolutionaries within the ranks of the Indian working class and peasant movements. That was why, its spread was quick and phenomenal, its challenge to revisionism within the communist movement in India was aggressive. These Telengana

could not achieve.

To Indian counter-revolution, Naxalbari was a menace not merely because its call was for the seizure of state power, which in fact was also the slogan of the heroic Telengana struggle. It became a menace because at the time people's sufferings grew to an unbearable extent, both economic crisis and ruling class exploitation were intensified to an unprecedented degree and the last but not the least, the Naxalbari movement defied the leadership of the revisionists leadership of the communist movement and went forward to independently organise the Indian revolutionaries.

It is to be noted that only after Naxalbari, Indian counter-revolution started raising mouthful slogans about 'socialism', slogans like 'Non-violence' and 'democracy' being relegated to the background. In fact, to the ruling classes, slogans of 'socialism' became handy in suppressing all opposition to its government to resort on an unprecedented scale, murdering of revolutionaries in villages, towns and jails, to deny even the elementary forms of democracy (like disallowing or obstructing meetings, processions, writings etc. of any opposition party or individuals) to anybody other than those loyal to the government, to corrupt the youths with money and power, to corrupt all walks of life with cheap money.

With Naxalbari, both revolution and counter-revolution in India have entered a new phase—a phase where one lives only at the other's cost. Telengana belongs to an earlier phase of the history of the Indian working-class movement.

Arun Majumdar  
Santiniketan

## Unity

In his 'On Unity—A Response' Mr Ashim Chatterjee advocates that those comrades who did not join the CPI(ML) in 1969 'should be told that they made a mistake by not joining'. It is a unique observation indeed, coming in the face of his own admission in the previous paragraph that the CPI(ML) had been following 'close-doorism'. Aren't these two observations self-contradictory!

Moreover, Mr Chatterjee has ignored a singularly important question — that of correctly determining the principal contradiction of the Indian Revolution (national and democratic). Only by analysing that question in a Marxist method can the flaws and limitations of the CPI(ML) be solved. The eminent leader knows that while the CPI(ML) dogmatically held that the contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses was the principal one (which the CPC did not approve at all, even during Lin's period), there were many groups which advocated that the principal contradiction in such a revolution essentially was the contradiction between imperialism and the nation. (In this connection, the article published in **Frontier** on October 5 deserves congratulation). It is also known to Mr Chatterjee that CPI(ML) made only a show of debate at that time and hastened to brand the latter groups as 'ultra-left' sometimes and sometimes as 'right-wingers'. Mr Chatterjee himself was no exception. They wanted these groups to follow the wrong line advocated by the CPI(ML), in respect of principal contradiction before they could be admitted to the party. Had those groups taken up this line, they would have betrayed the revolutionary principles they stood for.

Lenin once said, 'Unity—a great cause and a great slogan! But the workers' cause requires unity of the Marxists and not the unity of the Marxists with opponents and distorters of Marxism'. Marx, too, cautioned that 'there would be no haggling about principles'.

The primary task is to end the confusion on the cardinal question of the Indian national and democratic revolution, i.e., the question of principal contradiction. If that is not done, not even a hundred congresses can save the party or any party from inevitable disorganisation, devastation and degeneration.

Tarun Snu Gupta  
Calcutta

## Cricket

Cricket has turned our heads as does puja. Possibly urban youths of India find it easy to display their youthfulness and vitality through such things. A

huge army of unemployed youths is very useful as an unlimited source of energy. It is the cursed poor youth that always wants to waste some energy. At least, it must have something to do and that, after all, is very pleasant if it is something like playing with the snakes of "Baburam Sapurey". If you are a cricket fan, you may have the pleasure of shouting slogans (for example "Madanlal Zindabad!" etc.) or if any sort of intellectual exercise is foreign to your nature, you may start a never-ending debate on whether some players should be included or excluded; and after that you will be left with a lot of energy to demonstrate on the "No Bedi! No Test!" issue. Everything may be done smoothly without getting involved in nasty politics. After all these noble performances you are assured that the police would not be after you and MISA is not meant for you. Isn't it a fact that games are above politics? And after all, what a noble and royal game cricket is! Things have gone to such an extent, over cricket that even the so-called militant leaders and their cadres put aside the disturbing question of survival for, at least, five days.

I am not against cricket as such, but it is not above politics and Eden Gardens is not a sanctum sanctorum away from all sorts of pollution. In the present situation fanaticism and snobbery do show the cultural degeneration of the unproductive youths. The Government which fails to offer employment can offer TV sets. Secondly, cricket has lost the battle of its survival. It is essentially a pre-industrial society game, time-consumer and expensive. That is why it was easy for lords and maharajas, who belonged to an unproductive class, to play cricket. If cricket is to survive as a people's game, changes should be made in its time-schedule and the prices should be brought down.

Satyaki Acharya  
Calcutta

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## Defend Prisoners

The Legal Aid Committee has been functioning since August 1972 to help thousands of political prisoners living in sub-human conditions in different jails in India. Most of them being poor people and peasants are not able to defend themselves against the large number of charges (sometimes as high as 60) framed against them. If any one is granted bail or acquitted, he or she is tagged onto other cases and rearrested.

The task has not been easy. Getting in-stand by the side of the victims irrespective of their ideology.

The task was not easy. Getting information and instructions from the prisoners, organising legal defence in various courts, acute financial and numerous other problems, specially in a regime of police terror, stand in our way. But a large number of friends, sympathisers, and democratic-minded people and organisations have cooperated

During the past two years the committee has participated in various democratic movements to demand the release of all political prisoners and protect the civic and democratic rights of the people at large.

The committee knows that very little could be done so far and that our efforts barely touch the fringe of the vast prob-

lem. The committee appeals to progressive and democratic people and organisations to set up support groups in their respective neighbourhoods in order to provide continuous help to the committee.

It invites criticism of its work and suggestions. It appeals to all concerned to come forward and help it financially, organisationally and by communicating information about those still languishing in jail.

Cheques drawn in favour of Bina Banerjee may be sent to either of the addresses given below Money orders, cash and communications to the office (2):—

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Office hours: 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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