

frontier

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GUIDED REVOLT

THE memorandum submitted by Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan to the Bihar Governor demanding dismissal of the State Ministry and dissolution of the Assembly is not going to achieve either of its objectives, though it might have contained signatures of nearly five million voters belonging to all 318 constituencies of the State. If soaring prices, rampant corruption, and mounting unemployment were conceded as valid grounds for dissolution of ministries and assemblies, neither the Centre nor the States may be left with any ministry or legislature. None of the three maladies enumerated in the memorandum is peculiar to Bihar; all States are their victims. Agitation on a wider scale is not erupting because the people are cynical; they know that all three and some more have become an inseparable part of the way of life under the present system and any agitation will provide the Government with a pretext to set upon them its well-oiled machine of torture and repression. Even in the event of a seeming victory as in Gujarat, the alternative is President's rule which is Congress government by proxy.

To what extent the ruling party is ready to go to crush any expression of discontent against its misrule will be evident from the firing on last week's procession in Patna by armed gangs of the Congress. Mr. Narayan is a non-violent purist; he does not have a clear idea of what he wants and where he wants to lead the people who in their desperation have responded to his call. The only thing about which he is clear and firm is that the revolt of the hungry and the harassed should not be violent. The ruling party should have been thankful to him for such controlled revolt, for in the present circumstances there could be no better and safer way of planned dissipation of the people's anger. If the Ministry and the Assembly in Bihar can survive Mr. Narayan's agitation—as it seems likely—the Congress could well consider if it should, on its own, organise similar agitations in other States for letting off steam. But instead of bracing itself up for such an eminently useful course, it let loose on the procession its storm-troopers who, quite appropriately, operate under the title of Indira Brigade. The gunmen fired from a Congress MLA's flat as if to make sure that there was no mistaking about their identity. The Brigade has been disowned by the party, and disciplinary action has been taken against the MLA who has now been arrested. Neither proves that they were not acting under somebody's direction. They have

come to grief because they became too reckless and revealed their links with the ruling party.

It might have been possible to turn the tables on the ruling party if the opposition parties had succeeded in enforcing their will on their own MLAs and made them resign. The ruling party does not have a big majority in the Assembly and despite the CPI's support to the Congress the Assembly would have lost its representative character if more than one-third of its seats had suddenly fallen vacant. That is not to be, for many of the MLAs belonging to the parties which had decided to recall their members have declined to carry out the directive. Other opposition parties will now be more circumspect and refrain from a step that may reveal that the state of discipline in their own ranks is as deplorable as in the Congress's. Steps have already been taken for holding by-elections in the constituencies whose members have resigned in deference to their parties' decision, and it is certain that the same course would have been followed if all opposition MLAs had resigned. A boycott of the by-elections by the opposition parties—a corollary of their demand for dissolution of the Assembly—would have exposed the hollowness of the democratic process that the ruling party, aided by the CPI, claims to defend. Whether the opposition parties were prepared to go to that length is doubtful for they also have a stake in the present system. In any event, they have been spared the trouble of making a decision by their rebellious MLAs.

No Hara-Kiri, This

Mr Siddhartha Sankar Ray did not consult any member of his Cabinet or leader of the Pradesh Congress when he decided to institute a one-man commission of inquiry to investigate allegations against his Ministers. Presumably because he considers the State Ministry to be his sole responsibility. However, after this wonderful one-man-show-ship he immediately booked a call for New Delhi to seek a certificate from Mrs Gandhi

which was duly given, made a lightning visit to the capital to get further assurances from the omniscient of New Delhi that he had not committed any foolish act. But his effort to get a judge from outside the State may not have been entirely commendable! He has deprived a judge of this State, a son of the soil, of an opportunity for some employment in these acutely unemployed times. If it were for the sake of impartiality, hasn't Mr Ray committed some sort of contempt of court by casting aspersions on the integrity of the State judges!

Be that as it may, what exactly is the situation? The Chhatra Parishad has accused five Ministers of corruption; another faction of the Chhatra Parishad four. If both succeed in proving the accusations, all the nine will go. If none succeeds, then leaders of both the factions will have to bow out of office, along with their patron Ministers. If one succeeds and the other fails, one faction of leaders-cum-ministers will have to step down. There can be, logically, only these three possibilities and therefore, it looks as if Mr S. S. Ray has opted for a hara-kiri.

More so, because any man can write to the Chief Minister (why not to the proposed commission?) stating charges against any Minister, including the great incorruptible, the Chief Minister himself. Which is of course a doubtful proposition. Only one day before the Chief Minister of the State announced his intention to institute a judicial enquiry into the alleged corruption of his colleagues, the newspapers brought out an unwittingly embarrassing piece of news: the Prisons Directorate had not conducted any inquiry, though ordered, into the hunger-strike by Naxalite prisoners in Midnapore Jail in February 1974, the clashes(?) inside Berhampore Central Jail in November 1972 and October 1973, the hunger-strike inside Jalpaiguri Jail in December 1973 and the attempt at escape(?) from Burdwan Jail in 1973. These are only ready instances of the fate of the inquiry commissions ordered perhaps at the rate of one a day. If the findings of the Commission happen to shame the State Ministry, the CM can always manipulate

to drag things out by a year or two, till the expiration of his term. But things need not be so gloomy: who will have the cheek to write against the Congress Ministry, without running the risk of being hounded by the MISA? Look at the Berubari demonstration, where local Congress workers refused to accept a district president foisted on them and therefore were threatened by the angry Chief Minister that all dissident Congress workers will be rounded up by the police as anti-socials. That is how things go, and the CM's swift dash to new Delhi could have been for telling the headquarters that the style would not be cramped by any alien morality.

Postscript: The CM and some other Congress leaders have now decided that no Congressmen will submit anything to the proposed commission. West Bengal, it appears, can put up with a lot of buffoonery.

The Indira Radio

The way the Government went about crushing the railway strike reminded people of a civil war: all that unprecedented repression with the help of the DIR and MISA, the swarms of CRP, BSF and sundry other forces, the thousands of arrests etc. There was also the campaign on All India Radio against the striking workers. The usual low and dull level of AIR broadcasts was compounded by the brazen falsehood put out to create the impression of a near-normal situation even in the peak days of the strike. No wonder, even the trusted friend of the Congress, Mr Bhupesh Gupta, exploded in the Rajya Sabha and demanded that the Information and Broadcasting Minister, Mr I. K. Gujral, read the transcripts of AIR "news" on the floor of the House. Of course, Mr Gujral refused to oblige. However, Mrs Gandhi in her reply to the no-confidence debate in the Lok Sabha claimed that AIR was meant to project the Government viewpoint. This means that she considers radio and television to be important weapons in her armoury in the war on the people and that she will use them with a vengeance.

Mrs Gandhi denied that the radio was being used for party propaganda. However, even a casual tuning in would have convinced anyone that the way AIR was busy combating the "enemy within" showed that it could hardly differentiate between national interest and the interest of the ruling party.

Ever since the Gujarat upsurge, AIR has been trying to tar the Opposition parties with the blackest dye, all in the name of fighting forces of violence and lawlessness. The pro-establishment CPI elements who are so often invited to harangue in its spotlight programme rail at their political adversaries as if there were no difference between AIR and their party forums or as if AIR had already passed under the control of the Kremlin.

However, not satisfied with the perversion of news and even downright propagation of lies and rumours, AIR has for some time past been putting out Government advertisements and even dramatic pieces sandwiched between film songs in the Vividh Bharati programme to blame the Opposition parties and striking railwaymen, directly or indirectly, for the people's desperate mood. It is significant that among others, Mr Charanjit, the script writer of the "Radio Jhuttistan" programme so popular during the last two wars with Pakistan, was engaged to churn out short dramatic pieces to fortify the "enemy within" stance of the DAVP in newspaper advertisements. All sorts of social evils like blackmarketing, hoarding etc. were being blamed on railmen and on students who were supposed to have fallen into the trap of the Opposition parties. This is what a recent Government advertisement on AIR openly suggested.

A dramatic piece put out in the "Hava Mahal" programme on May 15, the day of the all-India bandh, was particularly obnoxious. Written by Mr Rewati Sharan, a known Hindi writer, it projected the railway workers as biting the hand that feeds them. In strident tones railway workers were accused in the radio play by some casual labourers of trying to join in the "general scramble" to grab more than their due. The strikers were threatened with general violence and cutting off food supplies to

their colonies. The bullying casual labourers who acted as the Government spokesmen also demanded that the "right to strike" be taken away from anti-government workers.

The rail strike has exposed All India Radio as an official purveyor of black lies and an instrument of repression as never before. However, in view of the deepening crisis, proven government incompetence and increasing impotence of the people, one wonders how long it can continue to delude the people with official falsehood.

Russian Newsprint

When it comes to any commercial transaction the Soviet Union turns particularly harsh on those countries which are tied to its apron strings. Many instances could be cited to substantiate this observation; but we need not go very far, since the latest instance of Soviet exploitation which has hit the headlines here gives a fair idea of how the dependent countries are held to ransom by a socialist big brother. Moscow is demanding a price for its newsprint which is 50 per cent higher than the price quoted by some leading suppliers. According to Mr I. K. Gujral, Information Minister, the USSR has offered to supply 45,000 tonnes of newsprint during 1974-75 at a fantastically high price of Rs. 4,200 a tonne. This is against the price of Rs. 2,848 a tonne (cif) at which Canada is supplying us the commodity. During 1973-74 the Soviet Union once revised upward the price from Rs. 2,300 to Rs. 2,500 a tonne. There could be no economic compulsion for demanding an absurd price of Rs. 4,200 a tonne. The socialist countries are to a great extent insulated from the shocks of the capitalist world; in fact they have been much less affected by the high prices of oil than the capitalist countries. In the circumstances, the Soviet attitude could be explained by a desire to exploit a country which cannot turn to another source for satisfying its needs.

India is, however, not the only country which gets a rough deal from the Russians. The Comecon countries

have never been treated well and their economies have been dovetailed to the Russian economy to the benefit of the latter. The Comecon members do not know what price the Russians would demand for its oil supplies under long-term contracts. These contracts are negotiated every five years to coincide with the five-year plans of member countries. The next contracts will be finalised before the commencement of the new plans in 1976. These contracts have always in the past been based on the average world prices of the preceding three years and, once fixed, the prices fluctuated a little during the five years. But the scenario has unfortunately changed with the big rise in the international oil price following the October war. Current indications are that the Russians will not spare the East European States. The Russian Petroleum Minister, Mr Valentine Chachine, has recently told a group of visiting American journalists that his country does not envisage any increase in its petroleum exports. Russia's need for a higher amount of foreign exchange does not pose any problem; the same amount of petroleum exports will now fetch more. Moscow has also gone back on its negotiations with the Japanese for the exploration of oil in Siberia. Mr Chachine has said that he does not think that foreigners would be invited to help in exploiting Russia's oil resources. The Comecon members currently pay around 15 roubles a tonne or approximately \$3 a barrel; they have been promised that there will be no change in the price for another year and a half. But if after that the East Europeans are asked to pay the ruling market price for Soviet oil, the impact of it on their economies will be shattering.

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Maximum Work, Minimum Wage

BY A CORRESPONDENT

WEALTH in the form of revenue and profit has always been drained out of the Sunderbans area. The population has, on the other hand, more than doubled after partition. Not a single plot of land has been left uncultivated. For the unabating exploitation and wealth drain there is however no development of production. Methods of exploitation are modified whenever necessary.

The part of the Sunderbans in West Bengal at one time mainly consisted of people from Midnapore. Even now it is so in the western part. The dialects of Midnapore were in use here. But after partition people from Khulna came here in large numbers and in the real Sunderbans they form the majority of the population. The Midnapore dialect no longer enjoys the prestige of being the only vehicle of communication.

The district of Khulna now in Bangladesh was formed as a Sunderbans district in 1882, according to O'Malley's Khulna District Gazetteer. The toiling masses of the area were described as amphibious. When they came to West Bengal Sunderbans after partition they brought with them their own age-old characteristics, and their work time and wage system stood in sharp contrast to those of the Midnapore people. Midnapore had never been secluded from the mainland and the exploitation there had some veneer of humanity. Labourers who came from that area were accustomed to hard work. They had a fixed routine for work. It was observed by the present author in 1949-50 that a labourer from Midnapore would work from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., resume work at 2 p.m. and continue for the rest of the day. They received their wages in hard cash. But the Khulna people working in the Sunderbans would not stick to this routine work. They would start early in the morning and there would be no break

until about 3 p.m. After a short break, work would be resumed. They would make ready in the evening the seedling for transplantation next day. No separate work day could be wasted. For that work no payment was made in hard cash. Instead paddy was paid as wages. "Agricultural labourers are however commonly paid in kind and it is the general custom for day labourers employed in cutting paddy to be paid by a share in the crop varying according to circumstances from 1/3rd to 1/6th of the amount cut by them". (O'Malley—Khulna District Gazetteer).

This brings out how people in the early period were employed. Their arrival in the West Bengal part was a blow to the Midnapore people who were thrown aside and newcomers were employed. A keen competition between these two sections was a blessing for the jotedars. Working hours were increased. But as regards the wage system the Khulna system was discarded.

Even as late as the sixties a man employed for cultivation or harvesting was sometimes paid by paddy. But as hoarding and blackmarketing of rice went further ahead, wage in cash was forced in areas where payment of wage in kind was current. As the unemployment problem was acute this enforced change could not be resisted. So the Khulna work time and the Midnapore wage system, i.e. maximum work and minimum wage, have been introduced as a general policy by the jotedars. Some people from Khulna in the early sixties took a certain amount of paddy from the jotedars during August-October and sometimes in April-May, i.e. in pre-harvesting and pre-cultivation periods as advance. During harvest or cultivation they would have to stay in the houses of these jotedars. For a month or more at a time, they would have to work for the jotedars like slaves.

When they left, the advance would be deducted from their wage. This system is being modified drastically. Paddy is still paid as advance. But its price in the pre-harvesting and pre-cultivation periods is very high. This amount has to be repaid with interest after harvesting. At that time paddy is abundant and its price is so low that people have to pay about three times more than what they had taken in advance. So when they come back, after slave's labour for a month, they come in penury if not with increased debt. Thus they cannot escape the clutches of the jotedars.

Eviction

This practice of giving advance in kind and taking repayment in cash is not adopted by the jotedars alone. Rather they sometimes borrow the system. It is practised also by some money-lenders, businessman etc. As a result even the huts of the indebted, not to speak of their plots of land, are sold off to these gracious fellows.

After the abolition of the zamindari system the Khas lanns were supposed to have been distributed among the landless peasants. Best the jotedars were given sufficient time to occupy them surreptitiously. When these were 'distributed' among the landless peasants and they went to cultivate, what they got was injunction notices from law courts. The touts came forward, extending their helping hand. They would go to Calcutta and look after the cases. So people had to subscribe every time the touts went to Calcutta. The accounts were never questioned. These days Gosaba, the Hamilton estate, is acquiring importance in some quarters. A tout of Gosaba, famous as a political figure attached to a leftist party now in the nine-party

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alliance, increased his income in the same way. The manager of the estate who is also the medical officer of the charitable dispensary and yet known as a private practitioner is a jotedar holding more than 50 bighas of land. He still has a piece of Khas land. In 1969 when this Khas land was in question he supported a parliamentary leftist party and several weapons, it is said, were supplied to guard him as well as his estates.

The land entrusted to landless peasants cannot be sold in any case. But illegal transfers may be traced everywhere. A jotedar managed to collect a piece of Khas land in the name of his hired labourer. This man cultivated the land but the crop went to the jotedar and no one could do anything about it. The land mortgage system of the area should be mentioned in this connection. One may borrow, say, one hundred rupees from a man. In exchange, the lender cultivates the land of the borrower for the time limit for repaying the amount. If there is no repayment within the time limit the land is to be considered as sold to the lender. Generally there is no such repayment; even plots of Khas land go over to the moneylenders in this manner.

In 1955-56 people coming from East Bengal made their dwelling places in some inhabitable areas of Gosaba. In course of time they made plots of Khas land habitable through their hard labour. These plots were allotted on condition that these would never be sold. But as these plots have become important in the eyes of privileged people these are being transferred to businessmen and jotedars and the unfortunate owners are being driven out.

(To be concluded)

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JUNE 15, 1974

Social Scenario

B. G.

WITHOUT the aid of some kind of an instrument like stereoscope, you cannot piece together the fragmented images of Indian society today. If you don't have a thorough grasp of what is called 'materialist dialectics', which is 'the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects' (Lenin), and which I confess, I do not have, some sort of a binocular stereoscopic vision may help you to dissolve one social picture into another, even though each may be of different colour and composition. With this vision everything will be in clear perspective, from Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's miracles to Comrade S. A. Dange's Marxian acrobatic feats, from our 'Indian' democracy to our 'Gandhian' non-violence, from the nuclear explosion in Rajasthan to the price-level-black money explosion in Hindusthan, from the 'Indianness' of secularism to the burning of Harijans and communal killings, from the 'House Full' cinema houses on a 'Bandh' day to the cultural seminars, fairs and festivals and the booming revival of obscure religious cults and megalithic rituals.

Happy Family

The 20-day-old strike by railwaymen was called off at 6 a.m. on May 28. President Giri was happy. The Prime Minister said that she, too, was happy to learn that the strike had been called off. The Railway Minister was also happy and he said that whatever fair and necessary would be done. Comrade Dange was happy because he was dialectically convinced that the strike had been a grand success. The 'loyal' workers were also very much happy because they will get an advance increment for their courageous and dedicated work. In a written statement our CM said that 'everybody' would be happy now that the strike had been withdrawn. Comrade Fernandes should also be happy for the unconditional withdrawal of the strike, (although he was in Tihar jail for some time, wherefrom he took the trouble of writing so many letters to the

PM and to the President for a negotiated settlement of the strike. Comrade F has exonerated Comrade D and his AITUC from the charge of strike-breakers. Other TU leaders who toe the line of F and D are also happy at the end of the strike.

But there are others who are not happy. They are lakhs of railway workers who have fought valiantly against the carefully planned repression of our 'democratic' and 'non-violent' Government and against the treacherous intrigues of professional TU leaders. They are angry. They are bitter. Their dignity as 'humans' has been disgraced to an unbelievable extent. The thorough going manner in which the workers, their inmates and relatives, including women, have been tortured, terrorised, evicted and chased out by RPF, BSF, TA and organised hoodlums, is something unprecedented in the history of democratic struggle for human rights in any country. What is strange and ominous is that the note of protest against this massive repression sounded like the whimpering of ill-fed street dogs. The TU leaders who have been trading so long with the utter helplessness and misery of the workers should take this as a kind of stern warning of history. Neither history, nor the workers, will forget and forgive them. This is not the end of a strike, and a great strike at that, perhaps the greatest in the history of working-class struggle in India. This is the end of whatever is decent and dignified even in the tattered concept of 'bourgeois democracy'.

Holidaying

The PM must have strained her every nerve to win the battle against the striking railwaymen and to announce her coming victory a few days before their surrender with a nuclear bang. Nobody's nerves needed rest more than those of the PM. She therefore holidayed with her son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren, near Mashobra village, 9 km

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from Simla, at the 'Retreat', a two-storey 19th century mansion, in the middle of a 300-acre oak forest. She loves riding, but unfortunately while riding in the 'Retreat' forest she fell off a horse and the attending doctors found after an X-ray examination that the bone of one of her ten fingers had cracked. It was quickly bandaged and an unruffled PM immediately rejoined the vacationing family. We are really very sorry for the crack in the bone of a finger, though minor, of our PM. Even one finger of an Indian PM is more precious than one million heads and chests of the Indian rabble, which get completely cracked and smashed in their just struggle for existence. We sincerely wish a speedy recovery of the injured finger of the PM, so that, back in New Delhi with restored nerves, she may be able to put her signature with the help of that finger on hundreds of documents and pledges, all aiming at socialism and Garibi Hatao.

Priests Protest

Before the railwaymen's strike was called off, the priest-members of the Paschim Banga Pundit Mahasammelan, that is the traditional elite, met at their annual conference at Howrah Town Hall. Some of their grievances and demands were expressed in the conference. The pundits pointed out that the use of materials like cotton, coir, foam, shell and the like in the making of images of gods and goddesses, is totally irreligious and anti-traditional. The pundits demand that this be stopped by the Government. This righteous indignation of the pundits should not be ignored. But one thing is missing in their resolution. The materials are no doubt anti-shastric, but what about the images? These are now made in the likeness of very

popular men and women. For instance, the image of Durga is often made in the likeness of Mrs Gandhi, and the image of Saraswati is made in the likeness of popular film actresses. Lately there has been a trend in the image-making of Lord Viswakarma in the likeness of local Mastans. Most humbly we ask the pundits, should this trend be encouraged? God said, I will make man. I will make him in my likeness and after my image". So out of the dust of the earth, He formed the first man and breathed life into his nostrils. Man was not authorised to make god in his own likeness. The pundits should meet again in a conference and deliberate on this problem.

We support the demand of the pundits for an increase of their 'dakshinas' (fees and perquisites). It is true, as has been alleged by the pundits, that the organisers of the community pujas spend much on pandals and decorations, but very little on the priests. Dr S. N. Sen, Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, a perfect model of the English-educated modern Bengali elite, said in his presidential address at the conference that attempts should be made to generate religious feeling in the minds of the youth. While appreciating his exhortation, one feels that attempts should also be made to generate more non-religious electrical power in the thermal stations.

IMPERIALISM AND REVOLUTION IN SOUTH ASIA

Edited by

**Kathleen Gough and
Hari P. Sharma**

The book begins with an analysis of the impact of imperialism and capitalism on India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Bangladesh before and after 1947, and examines their effects on the social, economic and political institutions of the Indian subcontinent.

The second section examines the changing class structure in villages in two parts of the subcontinent—West Punjab in Pakistan and Tamil Nadu, and evaluates the responses of various sections of society to the changes being brought about by the Green revolution and the corresponding growth of organized peasant movements.

The third section deals with the genesis, strategy and tactics of revolutionary movements in India and Ceylon.

The fourth section discusses the repression and subsequent resistance struggle in Bangladesh leading to the Indo-Pakistan war and the creation of Bangladesh.

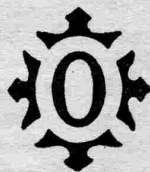
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The Falling Tower

ABHINAVA GUPTA

LITERARY propaganda can be as potent as any other in begetting myths subsequently embalmed even in serious criticism and historical works. There is a tradition handed down from the thirties of this century that the new Bengali poetry of that decade was in revolt against Tagore and his influence. While this may be true of the poetry that was really new the poets themselves stood in reverential awe of Tagore's greatness. As it is they who propagated the myth of revolt, this can only be a case of imaginary wish fulfilment. Odd materials from contemporary sources will show that many young poets of the thirties had an irrational faith in Tagore's god-like wisdom and infallibility. This seems all the more strange and inexplicable because some of them really turned their back on the poet and rejected all that he stood for in their ideas and expressions. If they still worshipped Tagore it can be only because of a sense of guilt and uncertainty—it was all they could do to justify their ways to themselves. Thus happened the strangest of all things: they rejected Tagore and at the same time appealed to Tagore for his verdict on such rejection.

To my mind there is only one explanation for this odd behaviour. The new Bengali poets of the thirties were like rebels who felt repentant after the first flush of iconoclastic zeal. Now in every revolt against paternal authority in any sphere of life, repentance is caused by a twofold sense of guilt: the rebels begin by feeling that they have betrayed the past and end up by betraying the future to overcome that feeling. But this latter betrayal brings its own sense of guilt and intensifies the desire for reconciliation with the past. In the case of the Bengali poets of the thirties this betrayal of the high hopes of rebellion was made inevitable by a cultural predicament which none of the poets could escape. The fundamental

impulse of their revolt was propagated from a source which was derived and secondary. It was a familiarity and imaginative identification with the new Western realism. In the West this new breakthrough in art and literature was imbued with an urge for liberation—mainly from the terror of solitude and annihilation. The increasing preoccupation with sex, cruelty—individual and collective—political struggles with their hopes and disillusionment, personal happiness and the ultimate meaning of life, was part of this over-riding yearning of the Western mind. This new yearning could not express itself without breaking through the past moulds and hence the new wave of experiments that swept through the world of European art and literature between the two world wars. Both the form and content of this new expression can be directly related to the historical realities of the period.

Derived Impulse

But this can hardly be said of the young Bengali poets of the thirties. When they set themselves to introduce the new yearnings and expressions they were only acting upon a derived impulse, responding to a fashion that was current, copying a vogue. I do not mean to say that, many of them did not share the ideas and feelings they came across in their readings. Nor did they lack true poetic gift of invention and expression. But none of them could relate their new poetry to the specific historical expression of their countrymen—the struggles and aspirations of the people of whom they spoke. There was much talk of proletarian revolution, imperialism and the need for identification with the people but little real effort to join and organise the masses for liberation. While the fate of Barcelona was followed with anguish and anticipation, the anti-imperialist struggle at home was left to be guided by Gandhian non-violence and communal fanaticism. The real masses were groaning under age-old exploitation and repression.

In these circumstances all talk of liberation, even within a strictly artistic context, was vain and had an air of

unreality about it. Thus it is that even the poets who celebrated a liberated Eros would ring false. Given the social and economic basis of the poets such liberation was bound to be a fantasy and day-dream. It is adolescent fantasy which strongly colours much erotic poetry of this period—even when the poets breathe a disgust with sex. But the unreality affects the poetry of this period all along the line. Was Sudhin Datta really perturbed by the fate of Trotsky or the defeat of the International Brigade? Does his existential anguish, which forms the subject of much of his poetry, chime in with his tastes and ideals as a cultured gentleman of leisure? It would be interesting to know how Bishnu De with his head full of Western mythology and Western psychology was to have his heart throbbing with Marxist dreams of proletarian power. And Samar Sen, whose passion alternated between a hatred of the semi-urbanised surroundings of the city of his birth and a nostalgic longing for the simpler and more primitive existence in the not-too-remote hills and valleys, found it all too easy to blend a Prufrockian self-mockery of well-bred upperclass urbanity with an abstract faith in revolution (perhaps aware of this contradiction and having failed to fuse poetry and propaganda on a deeper and more genuine plane he has long given up poetry for propaganda, pure and simple). But in a sense all of them failed to create the new poetry because of their failure to connect their derived sensibility with the objective historical circumstances of their being.

It is this failure which resulted in a desire for reconciliation. And the failure also constituted a betrayal of the promised liberation. Having turned away from the immediate past they could only find their moorings in the future. The intimations of a future which they could only create in collaboration with the masses, they disdainfully ignored while vociferously mouthing the current phrases of revolution. Some, of course, were shy of these phrases even. But all of them had to look for sanction in the past. And hence they resorted to Tagore's Olym-

pian wisdom for approval. It was all they could do not to turn themselves adrift on a stormy and uncharted sea.

Thus it strikes us as really pathetic, in retrospect, to find Buddhadev Bose, then editor of 'Kabita', an avant-garde Bengali poetry quarterly, writing to Tagore again and again asking for his opinion on this or that new poet of the period or on one of his own newly published books. The current Special Literature Number of 'Desh' carries the whole collection of correspondence between this young avant-garde poet of the thirties and Tagore towards the end of his life. Buddhadev Bose asks, in almost every letter, for a Tagore contribution to his poetry journal and Tagore obliged him more than once. Did Tagore turn against his own past and embrace the new principles of art? Maybe, for an anthology of modern Bengali poetry published at the time by Bose begins with Tagore and is dedicated to the venerable Olympian. And the god did not disdain to send his blessings. The moderns, it seems, were all Rabindra-bhaktas — whether Marxist or individualist. No wonder some of them even tried to claim this god for their respective religions. But how about Tagore's own views on the writings of the new poets? Both for Sudhin Datta and Buddhadev Bose he is full of praise—he discovers a certain kinship with them. Bishnu De, he most certainly disliked—for his mannerisms, he says, but the content may have repelled him too. Tagore may have found him difficult too—vide his exasperated comment on De's addiction to literary and other allusions. Samar Sen he praises but without any reference to his strikingly new attitude and sensibility. Of Subhas Mukhopadhyay's "Padatik" he says nothing: he may not have made much of him at the time. In one of his letters to Buddhadev Bose Tagore confesses to his limitations as a judge of the new poetry. Of course, Tagore was hedging himself against the risk of any future reversal of his own contemporary verdict. He could not have acted more wisely. For both Bishnu De and Subhas Mukhopadhyaya have won the highest awards in

the country for their poems in recent years.

'Aristocratic Origin'

In a rather longish letter he once wrote to Buddhadev Bose, Tagore takes issue with some unnamed critics who have ventured to judge of his poetry in a so-called historical context. The letter contains Tagore's own retort to those who still maintain that he was a product of feudal aristocracy nurtured by British capitalism. In so far as I can pick the thread of his rambling argument Tagore seems to have contended that if he as a boy delighted in the play of light of the rising sun on the shimmering coconut leaves or, as a man, revelled in the scenery of the Padma, it had nothing to do with his aristocratic origin or the fact of his being a British subject. Only a poet can feel such delights and communicate them. But such simple delights and their communication can hardly constitute the stuff of great poetry. At certain points in the pursuit of such joys—even at the simplest level of nature-poetry, profounder reflections must obtrude themselves and disturb the poet's hedonistic enjoyment of his own sense-perceptions. The ruthlessness of Nature, her indifference to human happiness, man's essential solitude and terror of death, innumerable social evils and injustices deepen and enrich the poet's perception of beauty. His sense of beauty itself is only a sudden, fitful glimpse of unlimited joy and freedom of which man dreams eternally.

Now Tagore's poetry—anyhow the major part of it—lacks a certain depth and richness because of this lack of contrasting picture of horror and ugliness. Obviously he insulated himself from all disturbing impressions which might interfere with his enjoyment of beauty. This particular aspect of his love of beauty, which also frustrated his creativity, is traceable, not indeed to his origin as a feudal aristocrat, but to his continued loyalty to the reactionary interests of his class. All the ugliness and horror were created by his class under the blessings of the British Raj. Thus both his aristocratic origin and the fact of his being a willing and

collaborating British subject did not make for the greatness of his poetry but its weakness and aridity. Whenever a small aristocracy subsists on a vast horde of degraded and mutilated humanity, no real culture or civilisation can grow or sustain itself. Such aristocracy can only affect a culture derived from extraneous sources. The civilisations of classical Athens, Renaissance Italy or Elizabethan England were not based on degradation of the masses, though there were classes and exploitation. In British India, the aristocracy prospered at the expense of the people who became poorer than they were under the old feudal monarchies. It constituted a parasitical growth fostered by the exploitation of British capital in India. Such an ersatz and degenerate ruling class could not create any independent culture. Thus Tagore's vision of beauty was at best an escapist flight from reality and at worst a defence and cover for this reality. The essentially parasitical nature of his class and its total lack of significance in history deprives his creations of any validity to the masses. He did not belong to any true aristocracy thrown up by history at a critical juncture to lead the historical destiny of mankind. He was of an unproductive and "unnecessary" class that only helped the development of British capitalism at home. Tagore and his successors could unlock their creativity only if they recognised themselves as "superfluous" in history, and chose a different destiny to redeem themselves.

The utter superfluity of this class and their borrowed culture became more pronounced in the twenties and thirties. And yet there is little awareness of this situation among the cultured minority itself. The glimpses of the "Sabuj Pat" and "Parichaya" circles which we have through some reminiscences published in "Desh" (Literary Number, 1974) make us aware of the futility of our Oxbridge intellectuals of which the intellectuals themselves had no inkling. They were immune to the sufferings and struggles of their countrymen and pursued their decadent and exclusive dilettantism with a rare sangfroid. Once again it is in the more popular

works of fiction and among the less educated writers that we come across an awareness of grim realities—though here too middle-class myth-making affects this awareness and dilutes it.

What I have said about the culture of the years preceding independence holds as well for the culture of the post-independence days. A small fringe of affluence fosters a parasitical culture while the overwhelming majority of the people are sunk in degradation. The situation which prevails in all under-developed countries where Western exploitation has created a pseudo-aristocracy and a pseudo-culture must pose and answer a question which arises in our minds: Will a successful popular revolution in these countries sustain or destroy this new culture and its values? In the West where such revolution is to come, if it comes at all at the end of a long and full development of industrial progress, the masses must have been drawn into the actual process of this development and enabled to share, create and regenerate the cultural tradition which is a concomitant of this progress. In the East, on the other hand, all popular revolution must begin by rejecting the derived culture which is the concomitant of exploitation and under-development. Thus at the beginning of revolution and also immediately after it, the old aristocratic culture must perish, in the flames of the struggle to educate and civilise the masses. The beginnings of this truly popular culture will seem a poor substitute for the mock brilliance of the old pseudo-aristocratic pretensions. This is why the cultural life of the proletariat after revolution compares unfavourably with the minority culture of the immediate past. But while the past could not redeem itself within the old framework of its values and had to decay from inanition the new culture, being more broad-based and having more potential universality, will conquer new heights. If this is true of all popular cultural revolutions in any country, it is all the more so in the case of countries where no independent ruling class has existed for centuries and no authentic upper class culture has been produced by it.

Book Review

INDIAN ECONOMIC GROWTH: CONSTRAINTS AND PROSPECTS

By R. K. Sau

Orient Longman Ltd. Paper-back:

Rs. 8.50

IN an admirably small compass, Dr R. K. Sau has tried to focus on the determinants of the character of India's social system. This book consists of three well-written essays, each of which can be read independently. The first and also the crucial essay promises to identify the law of motion of the Indian economy and thus to show how it functions. The second essay examines critically the futility of the efforts to fit a production function into the context of Indian agriculture. The third essay lays bare the truth behind the official slogan of Green Revolution. The second and the third essay, therefore, adduce some important evidence, the author claims, in favour of some materials in the first essay.

If anybody tries to understand the law of motion of an economy, he has perforce to discuss the character of the production relation as well as the profile of the productive forces, and their contradiction. The author considers first the production relation in Indian agriculture and then turns to the industrial scene. Then he takes up the recent discussion on the extent of poverty in India and criticises certain policy prescriptions for its eradication. Last, he investigates these findings to show how the system works.

So far as the production function in India's agricultural sector is concerned, Dr Sau tries to examine the extent of development of capitalism in this sphere. The question he tries to answer has evidently two different aspects: identification of the extent of capitalism at a particular time and identification of the trend of development. The first problem concerns itself with the essence of capitalism and its manifestation. And according to the author, comprehension of the exact nature of correspondence between them is the most intricate problem. Not only that, the author encounters another insuperable problem—the

relation between the essence of capitalism and its conditions, necessary and sufficient. This entire section is so utterly confusing!

One wonders, if there was ever any necessity for all this. If one opens Marx's "Capital" (Vol. I. Moscow) at page 167 or better still Lenin's Collected Works (Vol. I. Economic Content of Narodism; Moscow) at page 437, one will find that they have very precisely indicated the differentia specifica of capitalism as a production relation. While the necessary condition of 'capitalism' as a production relation is the full-fledged development of commodity production, the sufficient condition is the development of labour power as commodity. In fact this question has been settled in such a way, that, unless one itches for casuistry, there is hardly any reason for further elaboration, Dr Sau makes the issue unnecessarily fuzzy and the discussion ends in a circular argument when he ultimately announces: The capitalist farmer 'therefore' is the chief sign and small indicator of capitalism in agriculture.

Not only this. The whole section bristles with bizarre remarks such as... pure capitalism never existed anywhere in the world; nor can it 'ever' exist, or "... it is an open question whether Indian economy, its agriculture in particular, was ever predominantly feudal in the "European sense of the term".

Again the author warns us that the moment or stage of development must not be confused with the rate of growth or trend of development. In fact there is hardly any reason for so doing, for never were any three phenomena so distinctly different from one another. In practice, since the 'differentia specifica' of capitalism (Sweezy, "The Theory of Capitalist Development", page 56) is 'free wage-labour', one can identify the extent of development of capitalism by considering the proportion of 'free wage labour' to the total number of workers. But to identify the trend, one has to study the time profile of productive forces. Developing the idea in Marx's "Preface to Critique", Stalin in his "Dialectical and Historical Ma-

terialism" ("Problems of Leninism, pp. 607-608, Moscow' 1943) focuses on the nature of contradiction between the production relation and the productive forces and points out that the productive forces are the principal aspect of this contradiction in the sense that 'they revolutionise and finally transform the production relations. So to understand the 'trend' one has to study the change of productive forces over a long period of time. Evidently this is a very difficult task, more so in view of the fact that when Dr Sau later on in his discussion correctly points out how the continuation of a backward mode of production thwarts the growth of productive forces, this problem boils down to studying the cause of transformation of "the production relation" from the determined to "the determining". (See Mao, Selected Works, Vol. I. On Contradiction, p. 336 Peking, 1967). One wonders if Dr Sau really understands the nature of the problem when he says "it may be easier to identify the trend". Easier said than done.

After all these, Dr Sau lays down certain criteria of "capitalism", or if it sounds more Hegelian, identifies some phenomena each of which "partially reveals" the essence of capitalism. Examining these criteria, one feels that Prof Sau is obvious of the principle of "Occam's razor". The author examines the Indian agricultural sector in the light of these criteria and finally concludes that "capitalism" has not developed in Indian agriculture in the sense that it is not the principal mode of production, nor can it either develop. Jotedars have completely gripped our rural economy. They own large areas of land, scattered and parcelled. They persist in expropriating small cultivators of their lands and thus increase their landed property. They lease out the land at their disposal at exorbitant rent. Agricultural labourers are not 'free' because they labour under a bondage of debt to the jotedars, which is perpetuated by the latter who charge extremely high rates for loans advanced to the peasants mostly for their consumption needs. To protect this dual interest of "rent and interest exploitation", jotedars prevent agricultural pro-

duction being modernised. Thus we find that for large holdings, the average production is very low because of under-utilisation of soil and perpetuation of obsolete technique, entailing the worst misery for the tilling community. Surprisingly, however, for small-and-medium-sized farms the average production is comparatively high. The reason is that owners of these farms spare no pains to extract as much as possible from their holdings to barely ake out a subsistence. But while the poor peasantry cannot afford the high cost of improved techniques of cultivation, the middle peasantry, even where they can, desist from trying these out because of the accompanying risk presented by the narrowness of the market—a situation further aggravated by the monopoly supply position the jotedars enjoy. The jotedars, thus, not only block the road to "capitalism" but also bring about the ruination of the working class—rural and urban—by both extra-economic methods and the economic method of charging sky-high prices for foodgrains. Prof Sau's discussion in this area presents a fairly complete picture. But then one may get a still better picture of the nature of exploitation by the jotedars in A. Bhaduri's articles ("Economic Journal", March, 1973 and "Frontier", Autumn Number, 1973).

Development of capitalism in the industrial sector however, the author points out, has taken a less revolutionary course as the merchants took control of production. Prof Sau should have discussed the history of development as succinctly as possible to provide the necessary cue to the readers as to the shape of things at present. Instead, he kind of jump-cuts the history of industrial production in India to show the nature of operation of indigenous, monopoly cliques. They now concentrate on the production of luxury articles (compared to the average standard of living in India) for which there is demand from jotedars and rich peasants, highly paid workers and salaried people engaged in the ever-expanding tertiary sectors. While the author proves beyond doubt why this arrangement is most agreeable to the oppressors of the masses, he fails to show—and

this is more important—the historical inevitability of the present situation. Indigenous monopoly cliques produce these articles and not necessary wares, while there is a good market for more of the former, the market for the latter is very narrow because of the miserable economic condition of the peasantry and the majority of the industrial working class. Again to produce these luxury articles, producers have to import trade marks, technology and raw materials and pay the foreign monopolists heavily for them. Not only that, foreign monopolists invest their money in these areas in such a way that the indigenous monopolists have to pay for everything and give them good returns on their capital as well.

This arrangement allows the foreign monopolists to constantly switch on to superior techniques or to reduce the lag between invention and innovation. Previously, they had to suppress patents of new technique or keep them in abeyance because they had to recuperate the costs incurred in installing old techniques. This difficulty constituted a very big threat to the economic invincibility of the premier monopoly houses. Now since there is an international market for second-hand (or 'third-hand' technology, located mostly in underdeveloped countries, which pay a very high price for such technology, since there are 'tied' buyers, foreign monopolists are as if passing through a new phase of another industrial revolution. It is for this reason that the industrial policy pursued by the Government of India since 1948 or since 1956 has steadily earned acclaim from the proteges of foreign monopolists. This situation is thus to the advantage of jotedars, the indigenous and foreign monopolists. This is why apparently contradictory modes of production co-exist here. While on the one hand by restricting the development of capitalism, perpetuating obsolete technology in agriculture, under-utilising arable land and finally by keeping agricultural work purely seasonal, the jotedars ensure supply of labour at a low wage and help keeping low the wage in the industrial sector, industrial monopoly cliques go on appropriating far more than what they could under different

circumstances and their imperialist bosses earn a lot in the process. Hence the untidy alliance of these three. Prof Sau presents this picture clearly.

But when it comes to identifying the law of motion of the Indian economy, he only records the results of his findings in various areas without ever exposing the causal genetic-relationship between these findings. In other words he avoids the question of distinguishing principal and secondary contradictions on the Indian economic scene. He shows that Indian agriculture remains basically semi-feudal. He traces the character of negative industrialisation and focuses on its reasons. But why all this? Dr Sau could have identified the law of motion if he had explored the history of colonial subjugation of India, if he had proceeded to see how the colonialists and their proteges operate to perpetuate on the one hand, the semi-feudal relation in agriculture, and ruthlessly destroy our industrial basic. In fact if he had delved into the nature of imperialist operation on Indian soil, he would understand that Indian agriculture remains semi-feudal or there takes place 'negative industrialisation' in India because the Indian economy is semi-colonial in character. He would understand that present-day India is semi-colonial as compared with pre-47 India which was completely colonial. In the absence of this distinction, the entire study slides into confusing empiricism.

Poverty

Prof Sau's discussion of the problem of poverty of the masses and his treatment of the theory of distribution are not at all satisfactory. At least he should have understood that these two spheres of study are not independent of each other. In fact a competent theory of distribution in the context of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal economic frame would reveal both the extent and the real nature of the phenomenon of mass poverty. In his discussion of the shortcomings, and inadequacies of and inconsistencies lurking in Dandekar and Rath's policy prescriptions, Dr Sau does not for a moment point out that the whole analysis is pointless because their starting point is basically wrong. He also

misses the chance of comparing the results of various analyses on "poverty" and thus fails to bring out the essential difference in the nature of urban and rural poverty resulting from different modes: In fact one singular criticism of the current discussion on the phenomenon of poverty is that it is eclectic and therefore a distorted representation of the phenomenon. The real phenomenon of poverty—the relentless immiseration of the Indian working class—can be discussed only in the right perspective of analysis of the mode of production. Similarly, Dr Sau's treatment of the theory of distribution altogether takes a wrong track. In the industrial sector, big houses appropriate more than what they could under competitive conditions and leave both the small producer working under competitive conditions and the working class an increasingly smaller and smaller share of the produce. The majority of the industrial working class are further subjected to exploitation by the jotedars who because of their monopoly position charge sky-high prices for corn, labour's only intake. In the rural sector, however, the division of produce between the jotedars and the actual tiller of the soil, be they casual or attached labour or share-cropper, follows altogether a separate principle. In fact the latter are subject to exploitation by the former through market or according to economic laws as well as according to extra-economic laws. Prof Sau could have proceeded along these lines to give his reader the sketch of a proper theory of distribution and thereby analyse correctly the nature and extent of poverty of the masses. But the weakest part of the whole essay is Dr Sau's piecemeal suggestion for curing the troubles of our economy. These suggestions are due to his complete lack of understanding as to the precise role of the Government of India.

Coming to the second essay one can say that his criticisms of the production function are already part of the standard literature. For those not acquainted with this, this section is difficult and will hardly adduce any evidence in favour of materials in the first essay. For others, this section will appear at places far too

sketchy. But it correctly brings out the complete irrelevance of the so-called farm management studies and enquiries into the optimal size of farms.

In the third and final essay, Prof Sau analyses a new strategy for agriculture and the reason for the relatively restricted spread of improved techniques of farming. In his first essay he hints at the proper reasons when he says how jotedars and the middle peasantry shun these new techniques—the former, because new techniques constitute a serious threat to their rent-and-interest exploitation and the latter, because of the acute risk of realisation.

Prof Sau's discussion of marketable surplus substantiates the actions of the middle peasantry. Here he tells us all of a sudden that the cost of non-traditional agriculture is greater than that of traditional agriculture and hence the relative non-use of new techniques. Though this is true in absolute terms, it is never true in relative terms. In fact non-traditional techniques will definitely be viable for large-scale agriculture. So this cannot be an argument for the relatively restricted spread of new techniques. Instead of adducing any new evidence in the third essay, Dr Sau virtually advances new arguments not found in the first essay.

He, in fact, misses a golden opportunity for discussing the contradictions between the semi-feudal rural elites who oppose tooth and nail the introduction of new techniques in agriculture and their foster-fathers—the overseas monopolist cliques, the imperialists who insist on exporting new techniques. In the process Dr Sau fails to appreciate the role of the Indian Government which tries to stave off further worsening of the contradiction by absorbing the new techniques only superficially and by

For Frontier contact

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utilising public money by various methods to pay for the import of new techniques. Not only does the Government thus postpone the crisis, it also makes quick capital out of this move through the slogan of Green Revolution. In fact, this book, apart from containing few oblique remarks on the role of the Government, does not analyse this phenomenon in the right perspective.

To sum up, Dr Sau has failed to identify the principal contradiction in the Indian economy. Hence his work communicates too little about the law of motion of our economy. In fact, all these again can be traced to an insufficient appreciation of the role and the character of world imperialism today on the one hand and the development of imperialism into neo-imperialism on the other. He, thus, fails to understand the semi-colonial character of the Indian economy and the role of our Government.

However, what Dr Sau has accomplished in a span of 95 pages is really admirable. He is one among a handful of very capable analysts who are responsible for a re-orientation in the approach to the problems of our economy. They have proved beyond doubt that the Indian economy is poor not because it is poor, but because it is made poor. For one who long confined himself to only constructing geometrical proofs of the Von Neuman theorem and second-best theorems etc., this book is an achievement. It raises a very serious question: in the course of roughly forty years' struggle on Indian soil what did the communists do to understand the law of motion of the Indian economy? This work is a solemn reminder to the honest left that they have to engage themselves in a really serious analysis of the law of the Indian economy.

I. SEN

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Clippings

Suicide A Way Of Life

AGARTALA : More than 200 Tripura villagers have committed suicide during the last two years. Poverty has driven them to take the extreme step. The official figure is only 53.

Hospital sources say insanity has been on the increase, also because of poverty.

The maxim the Indian farmer is born in debt, lives in debt and dies in debt still holds good in the case of Tripura villagers who committed suicide or are insane. They had mortgaged their lands to meet some pressing financial needs. They lost the lands because the borrowed amount had increased manifold because of the usurious rate of interest. Added to the economic insecurity are the pangs of poverty and the gruelling toll it takes among the kith and kin. The family head then takes his life, that is, if he is sane enough to do it. Most often, he becomes insane.

Agrarian and land reforms have obviously failed in Tripura.

An indication of the authorities' hollow promises is that Tripura villagers have to buy kerosene smuggled from Bangladesh. That too is not very plentiful and when available, it sells at Rs 4 to Rs 5 a litre.

This, despite the Centre's assurance that it would flood Tripura with tank-wagons of kerosene. The humble kerosene lamp is a luxury for the villagers. So nights are darker in Tripura villages and students are denied their right to study off-school.

In towns, the situation is slightly better, though the townsman has to wait in winding queues for hours to get his meagre supply of the commodity.

The Government has failed to provide rice through the fair price shops. Poor quality paddy is being offered to the villagers instead of rice. The Government does not dare husk the procured paddy as it has been damaged owing to bad storage.

The Centre has refused to release more rice and wheat because the State Government has shown inflated stocks. Non-

availability of wheat has driven most bakeries out of business.

The Government had left no stock of paddy with the peasants for the lean period. They are now depending on the Government which has let them down. The villager's plight is being fully exploited by jotedars and hoarders whose stocks were hardly touched by the Government during procurement as most of them were serving the Government as collecting agents.

Starvation deaths from all corners of the State have been reported during the last two months (April-May). According to newspaper reports the number of such deaths has exceeded 20.

(B. Datta Bhaumic in Hindustan Times, Delhi).

The Three Musketeers

SANDIP SARKAR

ALTHOUGH Asok Biswas, Ramaprasad Ghatak and Asim Basu exhibited as a group, at the Birla Academy on May 14-19, they have yet to find a name for themselves. Actually the show could be called three mini one-man shows. Biswas has shown his mastery in water-colours, while Ghatak has used tempera and Basu oils. Biswas belongs to the fashionable set who under the unseen direction of Ganesh Pyne play their part. He has been able to project his own personality rather than be influenced by anyone. Although his treatment of the subject is sugar-coated, there is much in his construction that is bold and his lines are firm. His handling of colours is restrained. In fact he takes no risks with his brush. His figures vaguely remind one of Picasso's classical and voluptuous women done in 1921 or thereabouts. He has shown the same type of pre-occupation with volume. 'Waves and People' and 'Preparation' should be

specially mentioned. Ghatak strives for the simplicity of the pat and his affinity with Jamini Ray is quite clear. His colours have more of water-colour properties than of tempera. When a figure dominates the total space he seems to be on safer grounds but Ghatak finds it hard when space has a part to play, e.g. 'Expectation' and 'Shepherd', 'Meditation' indicates his depth. Asim Basu has mastered oils but is ineffective because he has yet to find himself.

Manab Banerjee's Work

Manab Banerjee's work exhibited at the Birla Academy in May was a wash-out. Why such a young artist should lack direction and purpose is very hard to understand. The whole show reeked of commercialism. There was much that was pretty and decorative. There was something of the calendar and pin-up quality in one or two exhibits, e.g. 'The Waiting Girl' and 'Still life with Necklace' and 'Still life with Transistor'.

Kapoor and Choudhury

W. R. Kapoor (b. 1951) fell victim to some nasty bone disease of the legs at the age of two-and-a-half and this kept him in plaster for twelve years. During this period art became a diversion. Later, when he moved about on crutches, he got his diploma in fine arts from the Indian Art College, standing first class first. He is a member of the Society of Working Artists, West Bengal. His technique is quite mature but it has the flaws of three-dimensional tonalities that remind one of Bikash Bhattacharya. In fact the resemblance is so strong that one mistakes Kapoor's works for Bhattacharya's. Kapoor's realistic drawing has power but oil seems to drip from his paintings.

Because of his prolonged illness—he is still undergoing some operation—the range of his subjects is limited. He himself seems to be the centre around which his creative world evolves and naturally this gives his paintings a strong pessimistic flavour. In some of these he has erotic visions of love-making and nude women. All in all, no one can doubt that Kapoor has a future if he works hard to overcome

his self-pity. He must also steer clear of the alluring straits of surrealism.

After a long time Biren Choudhury had an exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts, from the end of May to June 3. As far as one can remember, his last exhibition had water-colours. In this exhibition he has shown a rare mastery of oils. He uses dull colours, quite intentionally, but the total canvas as a flat surface. His drawing and stylisation are simple but firm and have a sort of subdued rhythm. It is disturbing that sometimes his colours are too dark to be visible. This twilight kingdom is full of personal imagery which is sometimes meaningful but at others obscure. His eloquence is very subjective. All his works have grace and charm: particularly 'Kunti', 'Sitarist', 'Crisis I' are bold and eloquent.

Letters

Political Prisoners

We, the undersigned, are deeply anguished to know that many of the political suspects detained in Indian jails are on indefinite fast since May 17, 1974 to press their demand that they be recognized as political prisoners.

We also deeply deplore that tens of thousands of political suspects have been kept rotting in Indian jails for several years without even proper trials, and subjected there to the most inhuman conditions as well as to physical torture. Most of these detainees are young people who are merely suspected of being Naxalites. We are aware that the Defence of India Rules, Preventive Detention Act, Maintenance of Internal Security Act, and a continual series of rumped up charges are among the means used to keep these people in custody in spite of the Indian legal framework. We are horrified that in a democracy such flagrant violation of people's fundamental rights could go on. We urge the Government of India to stop it. More specifically we urge the Government of India to recognize these detainees as political prisoners and to bring them to fair and speedy trials.

We also ask our fellow academics and intellectuals in India to do their utmost for the same ends.

Dr Kathleen G. Aberle, Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada; Dr Chin Banerjee, Department of English, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada; Dr Gerald Berreman, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley; Dr Marlene Dixon, Department of Sociology, McGill University, Montreal; Dr Richard Flacks, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara; Dr Robert Heifetz, Urban Rural Studies, University of California, San Diego; Dr H. Hicerkson, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada; Dr John Horton, University of California, Los Angeles; Dr Mark Juergensmeier, Project Director of the Center for South and South East Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley; Peter Limquico, Editor, "Journal of Contemporary Asia", Stockholm; Dr N. Lincoln, Department of Modern Languages, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada; Mr Harry Magdoff, Editor, "Monthly Review", New York; Dr David Matza, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley; Dr B. Muratorio, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada; Dr R. Muratorio, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada; Dr Gail Omvedt, Department of Sociology, University of California, San Diego; Dr Franz Schurmann, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley; Dr Charles Schwartz, Professor of Physics, University of California, Berkeley; Dr Herman Schwendenger, School of Criminology, University of California, Berkeley; Dr Hari P. Sharma, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada; Mr Paul Sweezy, Editor, "Monthly Review", New York; Dr J. Whitworth, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

'Secret Meeting'

It appears from a report in "Ananda Bazar Patrika" dated 5.5.74 that the police arrested many extremists from a secret meeting near Sealdah.

I know the secret of these secret meetings.

About a year or so ago a report was published in the newspapers that on secret information the police had raided Mohammed Ali Park and arrested many extremists who were holding a secret meeting. I personally know the father of a young man who was arrested there. The father had to spend some money, in a secret way, for the release of his son arrested at that secret meeting.

These secret meetings are organised by the agents of the police. These agents had at one time infiltrated into the CPI(ML). They know the friends and relatives of the extremists they had come in contact with. These friends and relatives are not themselves extremists and are not in any way connected with the activities of the party. They help the extremists in trouble out of sympathy for their miserable plight.

These sympathisers are decoyed to these secret meetings organised by the agents of the police and there they are arrested. The purpose seems to be some wrongful gain by the police and also scaring away the sympathisers of the extremists in trouble.

Some time ago I was informed by a young man, whom I knew to be an extremist and who had been in jail as an undertrial for a few months, that a meeting had been called by a so-called branch of the APDR. The meeting was to be held somewhere near Beadon Street for organising a supply of articles of dress to poor undertrials in jail. The meeting was to be held at 7 p.m. I was requested to attend. I went to the place but as I was not very familiar with the locality I was rather late in finding out the place of the meeting. As I approached the place I found a police van to which about 8 or 10 persons were being escorted. I learnt that all the people who attended the meeting were arrested and taken to Lalbazar Police Head-

quarters and implicated in false cases though none of them was an extremist.

These facts remind one of an observation of a judge of the Allahabad High Court that "there is not a single lawless group in the whole of the country whose record of crime comes anywhere near the record of that organised unit which is known as the Indian Police Force".

S. K. GHOSH
Calcutta

Bangladesh Situation

The crisis of the ruling party has reached a new stage. Accusations and counter-accusations of corruption and misrule levelled against each other by the two major warring factions and their sub-factions, have resulted in the recent killings on the Dacca University campus and many other places throughout the country. It is naive to call these happenings a mere clash of individual interests.

It may be recalled that immediately after the formation of Bangladesh our party, in the first statement released on March 5, 1972, said that Bangladesh came into being through the military aggression by Indian expansionists backed by Soviet social-imperialists. And a puppet government composed of incipient compradors having links with decadent feudalism under the hegemony of social-imperialists and Indian expansionists was installed in Bangladesh. Consequently, thanks to the unbridled exploitation by the rejuvenated feudal elements and the foreign powers, particularly India and Russia, the economy of our country is sure to suffer beyond all conceivable dimensions leading to the present famine conditions and total economic collapse in the country.

Our party in that statement also pointed out that although social-imperialism has temporarily triumphed, the country has been exposed to the danger of the conspiracies of the two super-powers in their mad rush for hegemony over our country and also in this part of the globe. The events of the last two years have proved our predictions.

From the beginning the ruling party

carried in its womb the embryos of political groups owing allegiance to the super-powers. The initial warmth and cordiality between these groups gradually evaporated and very soon gave way to shameless greed leading to internecine quarrels over the share of the booty during the last two years. This gradually created favourable conditions for the growth of these embryonic groups into two major factions opposed to each other.

The two super-powers in their contention for hegemony (Russia to maintain and America to regain hegemony) over Bangladesh have been nursing and helping the process of development of these factions within the ruling party. The recent events clearly indicate the process of polarisation that has been taking shape.

In this background internecine quarrels within the ruling circles and their growing isolation from the masses due to their shameful misrule giving rise to an unprecedented mounting crisis, all the symptoms of a grave situation inviting a state of emergency and some form of military rule under the leadership of the ruling party and their foreign masters are becoming evident. In the event of such a step taken by the ruling party the situation will definitely aggravate. And in such an aggravated situation patriots of all shades of opinion become the first target of attack of the establishment. Consequently, the deteriorating situation will only add to the sufferings and miseries of the people.

It is, therefore, high time that all the patriotic forces and such elements in the bureaucracy, army and the police and also within the ruling party if any, should unite and make all efforts to make the people conscious of the developing situation and resist such danger by mobilising the masses of the people. Our party has been working along this line and offers all co-operation to such efforts of the patriotic forces of our country.

Central Secretariat
Purba Banglar Samyabadi Dal
(ML)

JUNE 15, 1974

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LET YOU LIVE
IN THE OPEN AIR**

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Defend Prisoners

The Legal Aid Committee has been organised to defend all those who are being victimised for holding political beliefs dissimilar to those of the party in power. Our object is to defend such cases irrespective of the political ideology of the victims.

There are thousands of detenus and undertrial prisoners in West Bengal only. Innumerable cases have been pending since 1968-69. Despite reminders the police are reluctant to submit chargesheets and bail is being opposed stubbornly. If one is granted bail he is tagged to some other cases. Thus the prisoners are virtually denied any defence. The overwhelming majority of those who had to be released after the Supreme Court struck down Section 17A of the MISA, were immediately re-arrested.

There is great need to expand our work and the task before us is huge. We can hope to tackle it adequately only if greater co-operation is forthcoming from all democratically-

minded people not only in this State but in the whole of India.

We appeal to all democratic people :

To contribute generously to this Committee ;

To communicate to us all cases of political victimization in need of legal aid.

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).

1. Bina Banerjee
Account No. 10816
United Bank of India,
Sealdah Branch,
28, Acharya Prafulla Chandra
Roy Road,
Calcutta-9.
2. Jayasree Rana
Legal Aid Committee
C/o. Mukul Ghose, Advocate
9, Old Post Office Street
First Floor,
Calcutta-1.
Visiting hours: 4-30 p.m. to
6-30 p.m. on weekdays (bar-
ring holidays).