

frontier

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THERE is something pathetic about all lackeys. They feel secure only by professing their "faith" more loudly than their principals, but in so doing they discard the manoeuvrability the latter always keep for themselves. When the masters change their tactics, the stooges either do not comprehend or find it difficult to modify their line without threatening their own existence. Listen to the wail that goes up in Saigon whenever Washington pretends to look for an escape in Vietnam. Think of the alarm caused in the citadels of south-east Asian "freedom" at the barest mention of American disengagement. If the lackeys are not immediately expendable, their charge is certainly transferable. There is nothing self-contradictory in a deed of transfer from Dullesian freedom to Mr Brezhnev's collective security. Not that the deed has already been signed, but the point to note is that the principals have changed their postures in such a way that the noises made by their lackeys no longer make any sense.

This is a point altogether overlooked by the Indian fighters for cultural freedom who are up in arms because the Russians have apparently been building a cultural centre in Trivandrum without proper authorization from New Delhi. It is comical to see that even at the end of 1969 Indian policies are being accused of such Dullesian crimes as neutrality against the USA, as if servility towards Moscow need any longer be incompatible with servility towards Washington. One can of course easily expose the viciousness of the present campaign against what is at its worst a case of diplomatic stupidity and official ineptitude. The U.S. Embassy had better tell its spokesmen among Indian politicians and journalists that it does not really matter if the Russians add to their cultural activities in India. There need be no fundamental conflict.

Apologists for the Russians have referred to the network of U.S. and British "cultural" centres in India; they have said that even West Germany has been allowed to operate several centres of this kind. In view of the present talks between Moscow and Bonn, one is tempted to ask whether the Russians could not save unnecessary expenditure by entrusting some of their cultural activities to several Western Bhavans already functioning in India; after all, they sound less committed than the Indo-American friendship societies, the British Council and the like. The anxiety the

Soviet Union has lately displayed for an accommodation with West Germany would have been inconceivable last year when Moscow professed to be scared by an imminent West German coup in Czechoslovakia. It is to be noted that Mr Gromyko himself took part in the first round of the talks on a Russian-West German agreement on mutual renunciation of force that began in Moscow on December 8. Herr Ulbricht is still being a little difficult; but the recent Moscow summit of the Warsaw Pact countries is believed to have authorized the Pact members to begin negotiations with Bonn without waiting for it to meet Herr Ulbricht's demand that it must first recognize East Germany. On behalf of Rumania, Mr Ceausescu has openly urged all East European countries to normalize their relations with West Germany.

The West Europeans are naturally pleased at the prospect of a thaw in the middle of winter. They know that as part of an accommodation they must agree to the Russian proposal for a European security conference in the first half of the coming year. They also know that what the Russians want to get out of such a conference is West European acceptance of the status quo in Eastern Europe. So long as the Western Powers do nothing to disturb the Russian empire, Moscow will forget about U.S. imperialism and all its European ramifications, including "revanchism" and "neo-Nazism" in West Germany. Not only Russia and Rumania; Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary have also indicated their anxiety to improve their relations with Bonn. The Americans may not be pleased about moves for a detente in Europe without their direct guidance, but that is a matter that can be settled by Washington's European agents. After such sweet reasonableness in Europe, why keep such irritants elsewhere as Vietnam? Russia will urge "reason" on Hanoi and the NLF too. Then will be the time to settle its score with Peking. While it is all smiles at the Helsinki

talks with the USA and the Moscow talks with West Germany, it does not seem to see any possibility of agreement in the border negotiations with the Chinese. Mr Kuznetsov, the

leader of the Soviet delegation to the Peking talks, recently returned to Moscow to attend some formal ceremony—indicating just how seriously Moscow treated the negotiations.

The Privileged Class

The UF parties are so much engrossed in their favourite pastime of mutual slandering that they do not appear to have any time for trivialities like the bankruptcy that threatens to overwhelm the State. Anyone daring to raise such unpleasant topics will be faced with the ready retort that the two decades of Congress rule were responsible for such straits; the more radical of the parties may go further and declare that the ill is inherent in the system and only the naive will clamour for a remedy under the present dispensation. But they forget that the UF had pledged to work within the existing limitations and to make a better job of governance than the Congress had done. Not that it had promised not to militate against the constrictions; but the fight with the Centre for extending the powers of the State and a serious attempt to exhaust the powers already granted by the Constitution were to run concurrently. Neither is being done; confrontation has somehow become a four-lettered word in a non-permissive society, and an ennui has overtaken the Government in internal matters. The basic policy of the Government now is to allow things to drift, the supreme example of which is the Chief Minister and the Deputy Minister, sitting in two adjacent rooms, exchanging barbed ripostes without trying to compose their differences or bringing matters to a head. Whatever working arrangement the UF had been able to evolve in the early months of its regime have been set at nought, and the Government is back to the querrulous days of mid-1967. Procedures which had become normal are being questioned, and newspapers are once again at their old game of investing innocuous remarks with sinister suggestiveness.

In this atmosphere only inaction can thrive. The UF parties were never in raptures over the five-year plans; some of them are in total disagreement with the postulates of Indian planning. But none of them is against planning as such, and none, one hopes, disputes that resources are necessary to execute a plan. Yet after ten months in office the Government is unable to commit what its contribution to the resources for the State's Fourth Plan will be. It has resiled from its earlier position that it may put about Rs 80 crores to the plan till and threatened that it may not contribute even a naya paisa. Even with Rs 80 crores the State would have had a plan smaller than the Third; if the Government carries out the threat, the size of the Fourth Plan would depend entirely on the munificence of the Centre which, according to indications, may be of the order of Rs 220 crores, nearly Rs 100 crores less than what had been invested in the third-plan period. This does not mean that the people can look forward to a tax holiday; new taxes will be levied, but the realisations will be eaten up by the revenue deficits during the plan period. A case has been made out that the recommendations of the Finance Commission are responsible for this predicament of the State Government, because the proposed devolution falls short of the budgetary gap.

This may be an argument to secure a bigger Central allocation; but it is too thin to impress the Centre. There has been no attempt to reduce expenditure, except for the token gesture of lowering ministerial salaries; even on this account the budget allocation this year is higher than in the last year of the Congress regime because of the bigger size of the present Cabinet. By raising the level of dear-

ness allowance of its employees to the Central rates the State Government has undertaken an additional burden of nearly Rs 50 crores in five years; the employees are not satisfied as frequent demonstrations by them demanding immediate implementation of the Pay Commission's likely recommendations show, and a further rise of about Rs 50 crores in their wages seems unavoidable. The State Government does not have the courage to tell them to wait till the outlook improves; nor does it appear wrong to these so-called politically conscious employees that they should constantly try to squeeze as much out of the Government as they can; they are determined to exact the price of their support to the UF. So are the quasi-government em-

ployees. The tramways company and the State transport undertaking have already been sanctioned Rs 2.5 crores this year by the State Government as, in the words of the Chief Minister, never-to-be-repaid loans. It is doubtful if the proposed increase in bus fare will make the undertaking self-sufficient; the trams are still being run at a loss of about Rs 6 lakhs a month, and the buses will fare no better. The timidity of the Government is encouraging the growth of a privileged class to satisfy which the Government is imposing new burdens on the people. Its inability to contribute for the State's Fourth Plan shows that the vast majority of those who are filling the State coffers can expect nothing in return.

from a progressive government. The CPI complains that about 9,000 people were arrested during the movement, 1,000 have been sentenced to imprisonment, and prisoners have been denied even minimum facilities.

In this background the CPI has made a volte face and pledges support for Mr Brahmananda Reddy. Evidently, the CPI takes its cue from the political alignments at the Centre, where Mr Reddy is lining up with the Indira faction of the Congress. What is surprising however is that the CPI can unabashedly abandon its professed concern for workers and peasants, guide itself entirely by palace intrigues and even then talk pompously about socialism.

Not that the Telengana crisis is over. All the disgruntled Congress leaders who sneaked into the Praja Samithi to take up the separatist cause have exposed themselves during this interregnum. They are now exploring ways to get tacked either with the organization Congress or with the requisitionists' Congress. All the student activists, teachers and non-gazetted officers who formed the backbone of the separatist movement, have now come out of the Praja Samithi and are preparing themselves for the next move. Their no-tax campaign seems just a prelude to another big upheaval. It remains to be seen whether they too have the same compassion for Mrs Gandhi as the Akalis have and give her further-breathing space to sort out the issues.

CPI And Telengana

All of a sudden the CPI has discovered that the Reddy Government in Andhra has been taking bold steps to solve the Telengana problems. Taking stock of the measures adopted by the State Government, Mr Rajeswara Rao has gone to the length of congratulating Mr Brahmananda Reddy on his competency and sincerity in easing out the Telengana tangle. It is no wonder that the CPI has now come up with open support for the Reddy Ministry. It may be interesting to look closely at the measures that have brought appreciations from the CPI, which till the other day was the most shrill-voiced critic of the Reddy Government and repeatedly demanded its dismissal.

Even on the CPI reckoning, nothing positive has been done in Telengana except the framing of the eight-point plan of the Prime Minister. Mr Rajeswara Rao, in his review of the plan, could not find any reason to congratulate the various committees appointed under it. The Bhargava Committee which was to determine Telengana surpluses has not yet submitted its report. The same with the Services Committee which was asked to look into the problems of promotion, equalisation and integration of

the Telengana services. The Wanchoo Committee has come to the conclusion that reservation of services for Telengana people cannot be guaranteed statutorily without affecting the fundamental rights. And the concerned fundamental rights cannot be changed without undermining the basis of national integration because any statutory guarantee would give recognition to domicile rights even within the State. The Telengana Regional Committee too, as Mr Rao has found, needs far more statutory powers to watch and supervise the various measures for the benefit of the Telengana region.

This is not exactly a record to impress even the Treasury benches, not to speak of the professed opposition. On other fronts too the performance of the Reddy Government has not come up to the CPI standards of a progressive government. The so-called crash programme of the State Government for distribution of government fallow lands has so many in-built loopholes that landless agricultural labourers have a slender chance of getting occupancy rights. The CPI satyagrahis who are involved in the land occupation movement are not exactly getting a deal expected

Reception To PRG

A correspondent writes :

Last week the 'revolutionary' city of Calcutta played host to delegates from the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, the first such delegation from the liberated zone. There was no dearth of meetings, of receptions, of words, thousands of words, to express the solidarity of the leftists at home with the freedom fighters in that wee little country which is teaching world imperialism a crucial lesson.

Solidarity is certainly a difficult

thing to express. One cannot even think of organising a volunteer force, for one doesn't wish to be branded a romantic; one cannot exert pressure on one's Government to stop private industrialists exporting trucks to be used by the U.S. puppets in Saigon against the very cause for which the PRG stands. One is thus left with little choice but to make speeches in expression of solidarity.

This correspondent was present at a few of these receptions. Interesting was the meeting with teachers. As I entered the hall, I heard slogans being rehearsed. The room thundered with "Long Live the NLF, Long Live, Long Live" and then at the next moment "Long Live American Imperialism, Long Live, Long Live". A mistake. It was of course rectified at the next moment with "Down with American Imperialism", amidst much laughter from the audience.

Sitting there one could feel how far away was Vietnam. The peasants on the banks of the Mekong waiting for the Yankees with their anti-aircraft guns were an almost unknown quantity. What was real that December evening was the painful realisation that so far as we are concerned, the show's the thing, the publicity in the Press. What else could have prompted the organisers to announce at least half a dozen times that they were donating some money to the PRG fund? The danger of being a pseudo-leftist is that while you acquire none of the revolutionary virtues, you promptly lose even such things as decency.

And then the in-fighting. At two public receptions, the delegates witnessed sordid scenes of CPI-CPI(M) bickering. At the Maidan the "revolutionary" members of the parties had to be repeatedly reminded that their behaviour was uncalled for in the presence of the guests. All the while the delegates looked on impassively, with only a hint of a smile on their lips.

Indeed the whole affair was a farce. One only hopes the farce would not be repeated. Since we cannot help the NLF let us at least spare it our hypocrisy.

Calcutta This Winter

It is the Tourist Bureau of the Government of West Bengal advertising the charms of this magic city. Let us see them, the allures that are to beckon the lush tourist from eternity to here during the fog-bound months: golf, turf, annual horse show, billiards and snooker, navy and polo club balls, rivers cruises, Christmas carols, indolent days, bewitching nights....

After this, one can only break out into romantic poetry: draw the veil, oh, draw the veil, thy face is hurting me. This is supposed to be a State administered under the aegis of a near-socialist coalition; till recently, the Minister in charge of tourism was from an outfit which calls itself the Bolshevik Party of India. But no matter, when it is the question of hawking for funds, the wares that are to be flaunted have to be impeccably bourgeois. It is as if the British have not quite left, and Calcutta remains what it was in the days when a John Anderson was the Governor of the Bengal Presidency or a Tegart was the Commissioner of Police for the city. They are all of a piece: first the cricket test match with the team from down under, and now the golf and the turf and the horse show, the Christmas balls, the daintiness of elegant ladies and the elegance of chivalrous gentlemen. We may be bolsheviks all, but, simultaneously also remain British all, and the Tourist Bureau can barely suppress the raptures of joy which the coming of the cool season heralds.

Whom does it beckon at, for whom are its advertisements intended? To invite a stray American or two for spending a score or two extra dollars here, to trap one or two honeymooning couples from the West in quest of the Mount of Venus, maybe to quieten the nerves of worrying tycoons in Dalal Street in Bombay that the essential business trip to Calcutta need not quite be the journey of the Magi which the nagging wife had warned it to be? How much money does the Tourist Bu-

reau aspire to ensnare: at most an additional fifty thousand rupees? After taking into account the cost of the lavish advertisements, in the net perhaps only twentyfive thousand rupees?

There must be a reasonable price, we say, for compromising with one's values and proclaiming others such as would only pass as burlesque. Calcutta, this winter as in all other winters, offers open skies and bare pavements as night shelter for at least one and a half million people; another million and a half here live in hovels which are without even elementary sanitation facilities; Calcutta, darling Calcutta, is dying with every minute; its transport is next to the breaking point, its roads and streets are choked, the trains coming into it and going out are overcrowded, the apology of the river which is its egress to the sea is getting silted, a little more so each season; Calcutta, great city, is physically sinking, regularly every year, by at least another inch.

Calcutta is dying, but let it die without a witness, let no enchanting Cleopatra pay it a condescending visit in the course of this climactic season. Let not the vulgarity of a tourist bureau intrude; let it not exploit the occasion for the coarse purpose of earning a penny or two. Calcutta has other things to advertise besides the Derby stakes and the Navy balls: there is much serious poetry and drama; much cogitation over the themes and forms of the arts and the cinema; and much cogitation over what should be the structure of society in this corner of the world. If the Tourist Bureau is too haunted by an inferiority complex to propagate about such wares, for God's sake, let it at least be quiet and let us love—let us love the majesty of the spectacle of a great death. And no flowers please.

Phoney Victory

The high priests of American liberalism may well feel mighty pleased over their victory in the Senatorial

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battle last week. Senator J. W. Fulbright threatened to delay the vote on the Defence Appropriations Bill unless the administration dropped its "cloak of secrecy over U.S. military involvement in Laos". How far was the "cloak of secrecy" uncovered before the Senate cannot be known for certain, for the whole business was kept secret! But the fact that the passage of the Bill appropriating \$69.3 million for the Defence Department was accompanied by a resolution barring the Government from committing U.S. forces to a land war in Laos and Thailand would inevitably be interpreted as a victory for the liberals.

Nobody should grudge the liberals their feeling of happiness but some might yet like to point out that what the liberals seem to have won after a tough fight had already been conceded in principle by the Pentagon. Early this year Morton Halperin, director of the Pentagon's policy planning council, elaborated upon this theme of fighting Asians by

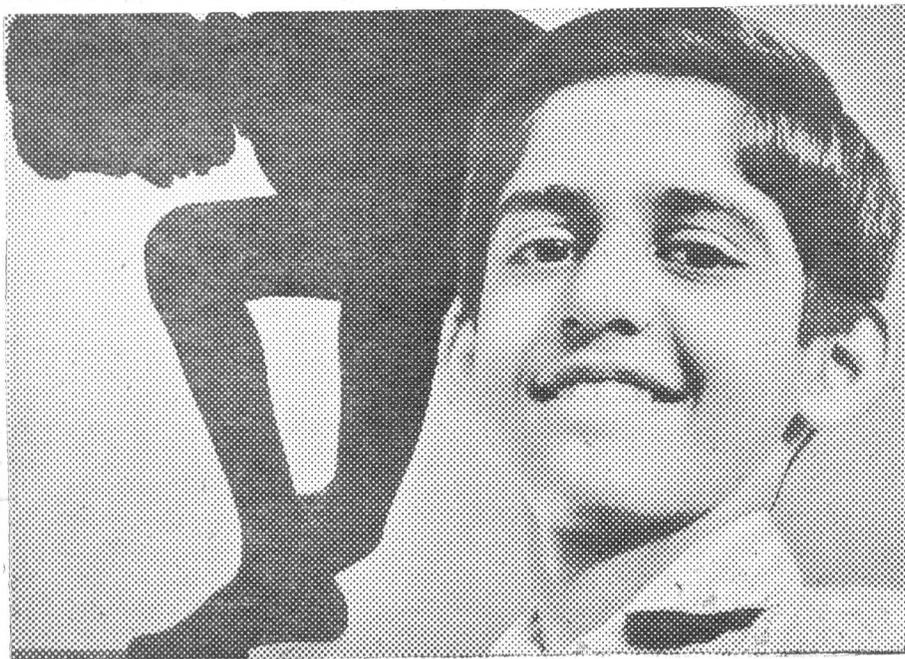
Asians with a safe backseat for the Americans. American troops would of course be committed to combat but as a last resort. And when that stage has been reached no amount of pious resolution can stand in the way of the Pentagon. One fine morning the liberals would wake up to find American GIs knee-deep on an Asian battlefield and that too on the basis of some secret bilateral agreement like the recently discovered one between the U.S. and Thailand.

Nor would the Thai and Laotian peasants be greatly enthused by the knowledge that they would not be shot like the villagers of My Lai by Yankee soldiers but by people having a similar colour of the skin. Humanitarian American pilots might avoid the embarrassment of looking straight at the face of a peasant before shooting him down and releasing the lethal load from an invisible height of some 30,000 feet but the bombs would still kill him. It is not known how the liberals feel about intensive bombing of the Laotian villages by the

U.S. air force or the 30,000 mercenary army of Meo tribesmen armed, trained and led by the CIA who are engaged in a savage man-hunt. These things obviously do not fall in the category of "ground combat" forbidden by the recent resolution.

What about stationing of American troops in Thailand even if they are not immediately sent to the field? Liberal Senators know quite as much as do the Thai junta that removal of the huge American military machine that has propped up the Bangkok regime would prove suicidal. Its implication is not purely military nor is it restricted to the Thai side. The presence of 50,000 American troops in Thailand generates \$900 million a year that goes to pay for the import of hardware from the U.S. One need not be extraordinarily intelligent to realise that the Senatorial skirmishes with the Pentagon are futile if not outright deception. Senator Mike Mansfield is said to have told the Senate last week that "One Korea is more than enough: one Viet-

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nam is more than enough." If one Korea was really enough, then why Vietnam? Defeat in Vietnam might lead the imperialists to change their tactics but they would not become Buddhas.

It is not just a coincidence that while Washington is facing mounting opposition against troops commitment, its Asian puppets are trying frantically to gang up against their own people. The day the U.S. Senate passed the resolution barring American troops from ground combat, Messrs Nguyen Thieu and Souvanna Phouma for the first time sneaked into the ministerial conference of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Thai foreign Minister, speaking at the conference, called for a "collective political defence". What makes this neo-colonial grouping different from the Dullesian SEATO is exactly the emphasis on the word 'political'. And peasants here in India or South-East Asia know what this 'political solution' to people's war means.

The seeming reluctance of the Pentagon to commit troops to ground combat and their puppets' noise about self-reliance and political solution are

of a piece. All this is no different from the famous strategy of Special War worked out by the arch liberal, John F. Kennedy, and his intellectual aides. Messrs Fulbright and Mans-

field would do well to remember that the massive Americanization of the Vietnam war which they now oppose came only after the total failure of the liberal strategy of Special War.

Ahmedabad

De-Culting The Personality

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

IF legitimacy is a function of mere numbers, either side can fudge them with ease. But in the Congress game, neither side concedes the claims of the other. If Mrs Indira Gandhi could conjure up a majority for herself at the Delhi AICC the Syndicate could do it at Ahmedabad. If the Syndicate thinks it was a fantastic achievement to have proved majority delegate participation at its plenary session, Mrs Gandhi can rig a majority in Bombay. The numbers issue is pointless because it decides nothing. The split is a reality and nothing short of a general election can measure the strength of each party.

But the old guard at Ahmedabad fondly hung to the hope that reunification would be possible some day and it was all a matter of deflating Mrs Gandhi's ego and de-culting her personality by singling her out for converging attacks. It turned out that the hardliners won and there was to be no compromise with Mrs Gandhi at any cost though a rapprochement was eminently desirable.

The Syndicate seems to base its strategy on the calculation that if Mrs Gandhi is isolated and attacked, sooner or later the new Syndicate in her camp (which includes Messrs D. P. Mishra, Y. B. Chavan and Mohanlal Sukhadia and, on the periphery, Jagjivan Ram and K. Brahmamanda Reddy) would bring pressure on her to make up with the organisation Congress or step aside.

So from beginning to end it was denigration of Mrs Gandhi, to prove that her "brazen-faced assertion of

personality cult" and her urge for "total power" were responsible for the split. There was no ideology involved anywhere but the Syndicate was trying to prove that socialism is not Mrs Gandhi's monopoly. The late Mr Nehru was attacked in the bargain because Mrs Gandhi had all the time been talking of someone obstructing the implementation of socialist programmes. Except for the 18-month Shastri interlude the father and the daughter have been in power. It would be cheap sloganeering to suggest that someone obstructed Mr Nehru.

As the wag said, the session was more like an SSP Jamboree minus ideology because the daughter and incidentally the father were the targets of attack. Speaker after speaker denounced the new-cult of personality and drew parallels from fascist countries. The Indonesian example and President Sukarno were invoked more than once. But there was another significant aspect to the debates. Perhaps for the first time the Soviet Union was attacked and at least two prominent speakers denounced India's growing dependence on the two super Powers. There was little to the session beyond this.

Contrary to predictions, the Ahmedabad session resisted the temptation to outdo the rival party in its economic radicalism. The panel report of the new Congress was a damp squib because it did not go beyond the ten-point programme. Mrs Gandhi was trying to find herself a left-of-centre platform. The Syndicate was trying to do the same. The dilut-



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ed economic policy resolution merely implied a challenge to the Government to implement the ten-point programme but was not aimed at embarrassing the Government leadership. This might have been prompted by a desire to woo the other leaders in Government whom the Syndicate hopes to carry with it once Mrs Gandhi is isolated.

The Syndicate's achievements at Ahmedabad are at best negative. The sagging morale of its following got a mighty boost with the claims about attendance, credible or not to others. It looks as though Mrs Gandhi's highest achievement was at the Delhi AICC after which the Syndicate managed to regain some of the lost ground.

But the Syndicate's strategy seems to have reached the dead end. It has to think of alliances with other parties if it has to go to the polls with any confidence. But a strong trend against such alliances is emerging from the cadre leaders immediately above the grassroot level. The leadership at the top however is thinking of alliances and this explains the lack-lustre character of the economic policy resolution. Mr Sanjiva Reddy repeatedly said it was not their intention to embarrass the Government. But it was also not their intention to embarrass the parties of the right, who are the potential allies of the Syndicate. Even a damaging demand like nationalisation of all banks (made by the economic policy panel of Mrs Gandhi's Congress) was not incorporated in the Ahmedabad resolution. The Syndicate session has not endorsed even half the demands its parliamentary wing has been voicing in the recent weeks.

So the pandemonium continues. Mrs Gandhi was in a minority in the Working Committee and earlier in the Parliamentary Board. In Parliament, she carried three out of four Congress members with her. In the

Our agent at Varanasi

MANNALAL DAS

D-35/321A Jangambari

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AICC she carried six out of ten members. But her strength at the grassroot level is a doubtful quantity, even if she is in a position to base her claims to party legality on the attendance to be claimed at the Bombay session. But the Syndicate will disrupt her bases in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. She must clinch a victory in her home State, Uttar Pradesh, before she could risk a mid-term election. The low-level equilibrium that obtains today can be upset by a dramatic realignment of forces. Mr S. K. Patil expects it in three months, Mr Morarji Desai in six.

So we go to Mrs Gandhi's socialism via Bombay, with Mr Jagjivan Ram playing the Santa Claus for the masses straining at the leash to quit poverty under the direction of the new Congress. Unlike the Syndicate, Mrs Gandhi would have to overcome the challenge of the Young Turk pressure group. Her economic policy stance will be in line with the Syndicate's whatever the resolutions at the Bombay session. There would be little difference in substance between the socialism promised by the two parties. But Mrs Gandhi has the edge because of the cult of personality that has been assiduously built up and the leverage governmental office gives. The Soviet argument that if Mrs Gandhi goes Indian democracy would collapse is absurd if it implies that Indian democracy hangs by such a thin thread, which means democracy has no future minus Mrs Gandhi. The Bombay plenary session is meant to confer legality on Mrs Gandhi's position as Prime Minister just as the Ahmedabad session was out to confer legality on Mr Nijalingappa's actions since July. But such rituals are meaningless because the party that in power, is the only legitimate party in the public eye. Where the Syndicate is in power at State level the public consider the ruling party the legitimate Congress and the one at Centre as an interloper. In the ultimate analysis legitimacy at any level lies in perpetuating oneself in office.

December 21, 1969

Kerala

Prelude To Confrontation

RAMJI

THE multi-rakh rally of agricultural workers, landless peasants, tenants and hutment dwellers at Alleppy in mid-December under the auspices of the CP (M) and the Marxist-led Karshaka Sangham, passed a resolution which could lead to a bitter confrontation between the have-nots and the authorities. It declared the land reform measures passed by the State Assembly, and now awaiting the sanction of the President would be deemed to have come into effect from January 1, 1970 and that the landless labourers, tenants, agricultural workers and hutment dwellers would they wrest passed by the elected Assembly. An action committee has been formed to implement the land reforms through people's initiative. The convention at Aleppy pointed out that nowhere in India had any land reform measure been implemented thanks to the incompetence or indifference of the official machinery and the fundamental right to property embodied in the Constitution. This clause has become a convenient cover for courts to strike down any measure going against vested landed interests. Mr A. K. Gopalan told Pressmen that the communists were not going to do anything illegal. They wanted to implement measures adopted by the Assembly.

The convention was a spectacular success. The mobilisation was massive and a significant feature was the big percentage of peasant women who participated in it and voiced their protests against the deprivations of the landlords under the aegis of the present mini-front Ministry. The day-long deluge of rain did not curb the flow of demonstrators to Aleppy from different parts of the State and the damp weather had no effect on the enthusiasm of the participants.

The proposed action at popular level has evoked immediate reaction from the ruling mini-fronters. The Muslim League Home Minister, Mr Koya, brandishing the mailed fist, has threatened dire consequences for the kisans. The CPI, taking a legalistic stance, states that the Government has already pressed the President for his assent to the legislation and that a Special Officer has been already appointed to implement it. Typical of the diversity of the united mini-front is the reaction of Mr George, the Kerala Congress member of the Cabinet. He has stated that many of the provisions of the land Bill and the University Bill are against the Constitution and will be struck down by the courts.

It is evident that what sustains the Kerala Congress and the Muslim League in the Cabinet is the strong hope that the courts, with writ petitions and stay orders, would come to the rescue of the landed vested interests. As for the CPI to state that such a legally untenable Bill, thanks to the fundamental rights incorporated in the Constitution, would bring in a millennium for the rural proletariat and hutment dwellers is nothing short of fantastic.

The stand of the CP (M) is not an afterthought, after stepping down from power. Even when the UF Ministry was in power, the Marxist Kisan leader, Mr Chathunni Master, had announced that if the land Bill was not implemented within a specified time, the kisans would take to direct action to wrest excess and fallow land from the landlords and the government.

A bitter struggle is in the offing in

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Dist. Jalpaiguri,

West Bengal.

which much blood will be shed. In fact, the massive swing of the underdogs towards the Marxists is not a little due to the swift and ruthless police action in favour of vested interests, particularly in the Kuttanad rice bowl region, the fortress of landed vested interests. More than nine persons have fallen to police bullets after the mini-fronters assumed charge, and the number of incidents of police brutality and Kerala Congress and Muslim League goonda activity is on the increase. The number of Marxist victims of political murders is also going up. The mini-front Ministry is determined to meet the land-grab plan with brute force. This would push the vast mass of the underprivileged into the Marxist camp. And it would cost the Marxists dear if they stray off from the militant path, they have been forced to adopt as part of the ideological strategy and by the compulsions of popular mood.

The mini-front Ministry has put forward tall claims about its achievements during its short tenure in office. These achievements were after all the finishing touches to the steps initiated and pushed through by the UF Ministry. For the rest, a ruthless campaign of McCarthyism is being implemented. A screening process is on and all the steps taken by the Marxists by way of appointment of personnel to for example the Planning Board, etc. are being retracted. The mini-fronters have begged the question: every positive step by the Marxist-led Ministry is suspect, where it concerns such departments as State Transport, for example. The questionnaire is revealing. The women recruits are asked whether they had occasion to visit the house of the Chairman or the Marxist Transport Minister or the pro-Marxist general manager or whether they had paid cash for getting their job etc. etc. The witch-hunt is on. Several heads have fallen, including that of Prof Joseph Mundassery, a highly reputed scholar who had been adorning the State Planning Board. These actions have been listed as their achievements by the new Ministry.

The Persuasive Industries

A.M.

IT was early morning. The plane brought a team of foreign refractory experts to the factory. Preliminary introductions over, drinking began in earnest, the hosts participating with a secret anticipation, the guests evidently without inhibitions. Lunch time came and went. Drinking continued. By late afternoon the hosts had succumbed to an over-consumption of liquor, but the guests remained merry and kept drinking. Apprehensive, the former produced the already filled-up inspection report and requested the latter to sign it. The guests refused to oblige—"Haven't inspected. Can't sign. Sorry."

With the December 31 deadline fast approaching, activities had reached the point of fever in another industry. Decontrol of the price and distribution of cement was to come on January 1, 1970. The South Indian factories were fighting tooth and nail to reverse the government decision, made and announced eight months ago. The two leading producers, based chiefly in North India, were unhappy, for they feared the ultimate extent of influence the opponents of decontrol might bring on a government desperately in search of support.

Both the refractory and cement industries have lately been in the news. Both of them have revealed, in a moment of panic, their basic weaknesses. Both were determined, a state of mind born largely of experiences gathered in the 18 years of planning and plan-holidays, that persuasion must succeed, for that was their last resort.

What is at stake? The refractory industry has been accused of having failed to supply quality bricks in time to the Bokaro steel plant. Consignment after consignment has been rejected and confirmations of orders have been withheld after months of nervous waiting. The entire industry had been banking on the biggest steel plant in Asia outside

The Peasants Of The Parganas—II

ASHIM MUKHOPADHYAY

WITHIN thirty years of the Battle of Plassey (1757) millions of peasants in the Sunderbans region rose to challenge the misrule of the East India Company.

Together with the agony of the famine of 1770, which was an artificial creation of notorious "Writers", the repression by the Company of the weavers, saltmakers, silk growers and other classes of artisans made life unbearable for the peasants. Towards the end of the 18th century the peasants of the Parganas, Khulna and Jessore defied the authority of the English.¹ They attacked the "Kuthis" (warehouses) and plundered carts and boats carrying the merchandise of the Company and distributed the booty among the poor people. Although this movement was sporadic and disorganized, those who led it were very sincere and serious in their actions. Realising their limitations they followed the tactics of guerilla warfare. Whenever the enemy overpowered them, they hurriedly retreated to the dense jungles of the Sunderbans. A section of them reclaimed the jungles and settled there permanently.

After the Permanent Settlement (1793) the struggle between the Company and the peasantry intensified. The newly created zamindars and middlemen came forward to help the Company, their masters. On the other hand, the disgruntled revenue collectors whom the Company replaced by the zamindars sided with the fighting peasants. At a time it seemed as if the English would have to pack up and quit lower Bengal. This state of affairs continued till the end of the 18th century. However the movement failed and its failure was almost certain for one obvious rea-

¹ *Bharater Krishak Vidroha O Ganatantrik Sangram* by Suprakash Roy—pp. 112-115.

the USSR to come up, for its revival depends solely on the profit it can squeeze out of the Bokaro orders. This extent of dependence explains the magnitude of the problem for the industry.

The Bokaro authorities have not stopped with rejecting the indigeneous sub-standard bricks. To complete the plan on schedule they have insisted on an emergency import from the USSR of 18,000 tonnes of bricks, and are now advocating a public-sector refractory factory. It is to forestall this that the private sector industry is now letting persuasion, Indian business-style, come into full play. It hopes that its strategy will finally pay. They have already had limited success. Steel Ministry officials are blocking finalisation of the refractory project on a philosophy borrowed from the industry.

The industry's failure to get sub-standard products passed in inspection at Bokaro is a new experience. Persuasion—liquor, money et al—has generally succeeded so far, in the private sector steel mills, and at Durgapur and Rourkela. The first shock of defeat was registered at Bhilai. But the overall effect was limited, because the rate of profit realised at others' cost was still respectable. The rejections at Bokaro, however, have coincided with years of declining business and profit. The sting is therefore sharper.

The other persuasive industry, cement, tells a curiouser tale. The government decision to decontrol it was strange. The growth of the industry, limited necessarily to certain areas where limestone is available, has been such that, despite adequate supply in proportion to the present volume of demand, decontrol would most probably have brought about a shortage. It was this possibility which had enthused the supporters of decontrol. Arrangements were on to utilise the shortage for blackmarketing.

Decontrol would have meant the elimination of the freight pooling system under which cement has so far been sold at uniform rates irrespective of any long-distance haulage. With de-

control, the areas with no cement factory near by would have had to do with cement brought in from cement-producing pockets, and in the process the factory nearest the market and hence requiring the least freight to pay to the Railway would have been able to tender the lowest price and monopolise the orders. To undo this, as it were, logical monopoly, the competing factories would have found it expedient to hoard cement, create an artificial scarcity, raise prices to cover the extra freight involved and ensure a "reasonable" profit and then start supplying. In fact, according to available reports, certain cement companies had already started taking these steps.

The South Indian cement factories were opposed to decontrol, alias elimination of the freight pool, because they had hitherto profited most from it. In an era of blackmarketing they would not have been able to share the spoils, for they are far from the main areas of consumption. However, they were banking on the political support they give to the DMK Government and in support the latter gives to the present Government in New Delhi. The interim Congress President, Mr Subramaniam, Mr Krishnamachari, whose economic views are now sought by New Delhi, and Mr Venkataraman, Member (Industry), Planning Commission, were all canvassing for adoption by the Government of the South Indian industry's stand. Mr Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the Cabinet Minister concerned, was known to have disfavoured decontrol when Mr Morarji Desai was its chief promoter in the capital. So did Mrs Gandhi. But for reasons not immediately clear, the Government had till a few days ago stuck to its decision to decontrol.

The persuaders derived hope from the obvious contrariness of a step like decontrolling a vital industry and opening up a blackmarket, to the recent socialistic protestations of Mrs Gandhi. They also counted on Mr Subramaniam's and his leader's dependence on DMK support in Tamil Nadu and Parliament.

son: the combination of propertyless cultivators and wealthy revenue farmers was a great obstacle in the way of success. A parallel instance can be given from the revolt of 1857. On several occasions the sepoys and peasants who challenged the Company's authority were betrayed and deserted by their feudal leaders. The revenue farmers and petty landlords who joined the peasants of the Parganas and Jessore stopped fighting as soon as they lost patience. The ignorant and helpless peasants either submitted or fled to the jungles.

The next movement in the Parganas was that of the salt makers. As has been stated earlier, the Company had been running a monopoly business in tobacco, paddy, textiles, silk and salt and making huge profits out of it.² According to William Bolts, during the reign of Alivardi the price of salt per 100 maunds was between 40 and 60 sicca rupees. But in 1773 it went up to 170 sicca rupees and in 1798 to 380. To the poor peasants salt became something as precious and scarce as gold and they used to consider themselves lucky enough if they could ever collect a handful of it to feed their cattle. Paradoxically enough, it was the Bengal peasants who used to manufacture this salt but could not taste even a grain of it.³ During 1781-86, the price of salt was twelve times higher than that of rice. The chief salt-manufacturing centres in Bengal were Midnapore, the Parganas (south-east parts), Khulna, Bakhargunge and the sea-coast of Chittagong. Everywhere at these places the Company practised various cruel methods to collect workers for its factories.

The plan followed in salt manufacture in the Parganas and Khulna was that the government Salt Agent contracted with the Malangis or middlemen (in Midnapore the middlemen were called Huddadar⁴) for the engagement of people as salt boilers or Mahindars. In most cases the Mahindars were forced to take

advances and the Malangis were vested with certain powers to enable them to drive the Mahindars to work. These powers the Malangis cruelly abused and gross oppression was perpetrated by the officials. They insisted on receiving back Rs 20 for every Rs 4 which they had advanced.⁴ The most notorious among those salt officers was Mr Euart, head of the Raimangal division salt agency. The Mahindars in the Sunderbans were actually landless peasants. It was only for their survival that they used to take advance from the contractors. Otherwise they had no attraction for the profession (salt manufacturing). The entire Raimangal belt was full of tigers and venomous snakes and above all there was the jungle fever. So it was quite natural that the Mahindars were reluctant to stay there. But it was Mr Enart who forced them to stay and kept a constant watch on their movements.⁵ At last the Mahindars revolted, stopped work and within a few months the situation became so critical that the Malangis and Sahibs hurriedly retreated to the town areas for safety. Mr Tilmen Henckell, the then judge-magistrate of Jessore, intervened and a compromise was arrived at. The main points were: (a) Salt manufacturing areas must be fixed and definitely located. (b) No one should be forced to accept advance against his will. (c) If it was seen that the people were reluctant to manufacture salt, then the business should be stopped, etc.⁶

Meanwhile the salt manufacturers of Midnapore had started similar movements. At Derduman, Birkul, Balasay, Mirgodha and many other areas salt factories had to be closed. Strikes, processions and hand-to-hand fight between the workers and the sepoys annoyed the Company. Ultimately it set its entire coercive machinery upon the Malangis. It is really interesting to note that during those fateful years the peasants of

the Parganas extended their helping hand to the salt manufacturers of Midnapore. In 1793 several hundred Malangis of Derduman came to Muragachha (south 24-Parganas). The peasants of Muragachha gave them shelter, fed them for a long time and also gave assurance of such friendly treatment in future. Next year (1794) another batch of the Malangis of Ajura crossed the River Hooghly and entered Tentulberia. This time also they were treated kindly by the local peasants.⁷

Thus the movements of the salt makers show the sowing of the seed of class consciousness, an essential pre-requisite for class struggle. The salt makers of Midnapore were actually landless peasants and the people of the Parganas from whom they received help were also the same. As this class consciousness hardened day by day, the peasant wars in Bengal also intensified. The indigo movements of the 19th century reflected this noticeable feature.

Blue Mutiny

The indigo planter of Bengal extracted blood from the body of the helpless peasant and transformed its glowing red into the deepblue of indigo through a process unbelievably hellish and unthinkable even in the animal world.

The indigo industry was transported to India from the West Indies in the last quarter of the 18th century. In 1778, one Carel Blume (English) built a factory somewhere in Bengal and submitted a memorandum to the Governor General pleading for the extension of indigo cultivation.⁸ At that time, England was passing through the phase of the Industrial Revolution and her textile industries needed indigo. The Company, which was exploiting India, both as a supplier of raw materials needed for the British industries and as an ideal market for the finished produce, availed itself of this opportunity and started financing individual planters to extend cultivation. Thus like

² See note 1, pp. 91-94.

³ *Joshar, Khulnar Itihās* by Satish Chandra Mitra, Vol. 2, pp. 697-699.

⁴ *Bengal District Gazetteers* by L. S. S. O'Malley (Khulna), pp. 43-44.

⁵ See note 3, pp. 697-699.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See note 1, pp. 98-99.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

other articles of trade, indigo also became a monopoly of the Company.⁹

In 1819, the Company, as it had done in the past, once again misused its 'prerogative'. By Regulation VIII it gave the zamindars the right to lease their lands and thus encouraged further subinfeudation of cultivable areas. The zamindars, who had been growing like mushrooms since the Permanent Settlement and living like parasites on the body of the peasantry, welcomed the Regulation. They leased their lands to the indigo planters and with plenty of money settled in the cities to enjoy an easy-going life.¹⁰

From the very beginning, the planters started a very repressive regime. In a journal printed and published from Mazilpur (south 24-Parganas) they were described as "Kings and killers of the natives ("সাহেব হে, তুমিই রাজা, তুমিই বর্ম").¹¹

Very soon the zaminders themselves felt the weight of repression. The planters began to press them for further transfers of land and even demanded their "khas" possessions". This led the zaminders to submit a memorandum to the British Parliament pleading for the Crown's help. But it went unheeded, because "some most faithful servants"¹² of the English had by this time started a movement demanding settlement of the "Sahibs" in India. Among them were Fammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Thakur. Their activities greatly encouraged their bosses, i.e., Charles Metcalfe and William Bentinck, who wrote to England that a section of educated and wealthy natives would be helpful for the settlement of the English in India, and therefore the Government should consider the matter seriously.¹³ Ultimately, it was due to the earnest efforts of the Roys and Thakurs that in 1833 the Crown allowed the planters of the West Indies to settle in India. An international entente was thus formed

between two groups of feudal exploiters against the toiling masses of a chained country.

As days rolled on the crisis deepened. The seasoned planters of the West Indies, backed by the Company, continued their land-grabbing practice and extended indigo cultivation over a vast area of the province. The Bengal Indigo Company, the largest—in the country, became the owner of a huge landed property, (594 villages)¹⁴ which it used to control by its various "concerns". Of these, the Mollahati Concern (now in Bongaon PS, 24-Parganas) had factories and several thousand bighas of land. R. T. Larmour, the notorious manager of the Company, had his residence here.¹⁵

In his evidence before the Indigo Commission in 1860, Mr Ashley Eden, the Magistrate of Barasat (24-Parganas), admitted that "till then 20,40,000 bighas of fertile land had been used for indigo cultivation and thus to a country, regularly visited by famine, a great wrong had been done".¹⁶

Regarding cultivation, the planters generally followed two systems: Nij Avadi and Ryoti Avadi or Dadani Avadi (also known as the Khatai jami system). In the former, the planter had to cultivate his Khas possessions and bear all expenses including labour charge and therefore the profit never came up to his expectations. But in the "Avadi" or "Khatai" system it was the ryot who had to supply all means of production including labour, "the Shahib had no other responsibility except that two rupees of advance."¹⁷ According to the Indigo Commission in the "Nij Avadi system" a planter had to spend Rs 2,50,000 for every 10,000 bighas, whereas in the Ryoti Avadi or Khatai jami system has expenditure never exceeded Rs 20,000.¹⁸ Quite naturally, the planters preferred the "Ryoti". The guiding

principle of their business was "maximum gain at minimum pain".¹⁹ It was one of the important factors which formed the back-drop of the indigo tragedy.

The planters who had been running a serfdom in the West Indies started the same sort of business in Bengal with renewed vigour. The government and the zamindars threw the peasantry at their mercy. To a peasant "the Khatai Jami system was as harmful as poison and he who submitted to it, drank poison with his own hands".²⁰ In this system a ryot had to spend near-about Rs 11 for every 2 bighas. But the outturn could not be more than Rs 4. However this sordid tale did not end here. After the deduction of the "Dadan" (advance) and "Dasturi" (bribe) this little amount of Rs. 4 was reduced to a few annas and the helpless ryot had to crawl back to his broken hut only to beat a starving and accusing wife. There was none to protect him. The agony of the Bengali peasants was aptly echoed by a native (Harish Chandra Mukherjee?) who wrote, "How shall I describe the atrocities committed especially by certain zamindars—native and European—who stand high in the esteem of the English community and who contain only rottenness and bones beneath the external polish of specious philanthropy and pretended enlightenment".²¹ But much more interesting was the confession of Mr Forde, Magistrate of Faridpur, who said, "The expression: 'not a chest of indigo reached England without being stained with human blood' is mine and I adopt it in the fullest and broadest sense of its meaning, as the result of my experience as a Magistrate in Faridpur."²²

The nilkars (planters) became a living curse in the everyday life of

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 87.

¹⁰ See note 3, p. 761.

¹¹ *Masilpur Patrika*, March 1865.

¹² See note 1, pp. 24-245.

¹³ *Nil Vidroha* by Promod Sengupta.

¹⁴ See note 3, pp. 769-771.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 771.

¹⁶ See note 1, p. 250.

¹⁷ See note 13, p. 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ See note 1, p. 255.

²¹ "A speech delivered at Midnapore... by a Native"—printed from the Patriot Press, Bhowanipore, 1856—p. 9.

²² Mr Forde's statement quoted in *Nil Darpan* by Dinabandhu Mit, p. vi.

Nil Darpan by Dinabandhu Mitra.

the peasants. Those who refused to obey their orders were subjected to inhuman tortures and even their wives and daughters had to lose honour. The situation was depicted in *Nildarpan*.

Peasants Hit Back

The peasants could not allow this tyranny to go on. From the very beginning of the 19th century they offered the indigo planters stiff resistance. In 1810, they compelled the government to send back four notorious planters to England and the then Governor General himself admitted that the atrocities committed by the planters had undoubtedly lowered the prestige of the Crown. A British observer of those earlier events wrote in 1848 that even in the first decade of the 19th century hundreds of clashes took place between the planters and the peasants. On several occasions the latter gave the former a good beating and destroyed the factories. In 1810, Biswanath Sardar, a peasant leader of Nadia, organised a large number of oppressed ryots against the local planters and punished many of them. It is a shame indeed that the bourgeois historians describe Biswanath as a "mere dacoit". In 1838 the Faraji leader of Faridpur—Dudu Mian revolted against the local zamindars and planters and continued struggles till his death in 1860. In 1843, the ryots of Kagmari (Mymensingh, now in East Pakistan) attacked the local factories and kidnapped King who had earned notoriety as a planter. In 1840, the ryots of Hogla (Khulna, East Pakistan) had a serious clash with Renny, a local planter. The situation worsened so quickly that the government intervened and effected some administrative divisions of the district.²³ In the Parganas, the most interesting of the earlier movements was that of the Wahabis.²⁴ Here one thing must be admitted—that the movement was waged not only against

the planters but also against the local zamindars and mahajans and the question of religion was never raised. It was definitely a commendable feature of the movement, because the Wahibs, themselves being ardent Muslims, championed the cause of the fellow Hindu peasants. This unique development of class consciousness among the backward sections prepared the ground for future class struggles.

To the Wahabis, a zamindar or a mahajan, (he might be a Hindu or Muslim) was an oppressor of the peasants and therefore a class-enemy. Although they were men of humble origin, they were united and well disciplined and became a terror to the rich. It was Titu Mian or Titu Mir (his original name was Mir Nishan Ali) who organised this movement in the Parganas. From his boyhood he had a definite idea about the mission of his life. He wanted to be the oppressor of the oppressors and began to build up a good physique. William Hunter who had not done enough justice to Titu said that he (Titu) "earned an ignominious livelihood as a boxer in Calcutta" and also joined a band of dacoits. But what better could be expected from a member of the ruling class when his own countrymen misunderstood him?²⁵

From 1830 Titu and his followers were engaged in serious clashes with the local zamindars and planters. In November 300 armed Wahabis attacked the residence of Krishnadev Ray, a notorious zamindar of Purra (Baduria Ps., 24-Parganas). This incident terrified other zamindars. They now approached the planters. Babu Kaliprasanna Mukherjee of Gobardanga (Bongaon subdivision) joined hands with Davice, the manager of the Mollahati factory (Bongaon Ps.). However the combined force of Davice and Kali suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the peasant warriors. Several planters, deserted their factories, cultivation of indigo came to a halt, peasants recovered their lands and refused to

pay rent. Titu declared the entire area a free zone and assumed the title of "Badshah" (Emperor). At Narikelbaria he built a fort with bamboo and mud and mobilised more than 1,000 peasants for its defence. Here on November 14, 1831 a battle took place between Titu and the English. He suffered defeat and died on the spot. His lieutenants were hanged and others jailed.²⁶ Thus ended the Wahabi movement, a brilliant attempt by the Pargana peasants to retaliate against their oppressors. In spite of its religious origin, it was one of the earliest challenges to English rule in India and at the same time a class struggle of the peasants against the feudal lords.

By the middle of the 19th century the indigo movement reached its climax. Although everywhere the peasants were up in arms, their struggles intensified mainly in three districts, i.e., the Parganas, Nadia and Jessore. In the Parganas, the peasants attacked and destroyed the factories at Mollahati, Barasat, Barui-pur and Boral. The managers of Mollahati and Boral were severely beaten. The important leaders during this period were Vishnu Charan Biswas, Digambar Biswas, Mir Ali etc. A contemporary missionary who witnessed the clashes gave an idea of the indigo fighters in action: "They had divided themselves into about six different companies. One company consisted merely of bowmen, another of slingsmen, another of brickwallas, another of *bale* wallas (their business was to send unripe *bale* fruit to the heads of the lathials). Another division consisted of thalwallas (who fling their brass rice plates in a horizontal way at the enemy) and another of rolawallas who received the enemies with whole or broken well burned earthen pots."²⁷

The movements raised a great controversy among the rulers regarding further continuation of indigo cultivation, and although the majority of the educated natives remained in-

²³ See note 1, pp. 256-260.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 260.

²⁵ *The Indian Musalmans* by W. W. Hunter, p. 37.

²⁶ See note 1, pp. 280-281.

²⁷ Letter of Rev. C. Bomwetsch, "Indian Field", January 1860.

different onlookers, a few daring Bengalis started an agitation in support of the sufferings peasants. The *Patriot* of Harish Chandra Mukherjee became the mouthpiece of the ryots and *Nil Darpan*, Dinabandhu Mitra's work, became a magic mirror reflecting at a time two faces, the face of the tyrant and the face of his victim. Ultimately the government yielded to public opinion, and on March 31, 1860 set up the historic Indigo Commission. From May 18 to August 14 (1860) 136 persons gave evidence before the Commission. Among them were 15 government servants, 21 planters, 8 missionaries, 13 zamindars and 77 ryots. Hearing the statements the Commission came to this conclusion: "The whole system is vicious in theory, injurious in practice and radically unsound." The then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal declared that the peasant of Bengal was not a mere serf but a real owner of land. In spite of these vocal sentiments no new regulation was issued for the restriction of indigo cultivation; the government simply shelved the problem and new troubles broke out in north Jessore. However the planters whose powers had been considerably curtailed by the peasant wars could not regain their former position and by 1895 their activities came to be restricted within the small periphery of 17 factories. Finally, after the preparation of synthetic blue by the Germans, cultivation of indigo gradually came to an end.²⁸

Link with Mutiny

It is very often asked whether the Bengal peasantry had ever participated in the Great Revolt of 1857. The so-called pundits, both here and abroad, have tried hard to prove that during 1857 peasants in Bengal were as mute as corpses and what happened at that time was merely a sepoy mutiny. Surely, a better analysis of a mass movement cannot be expected from people whose fathers and

forefathers belong either to the ruling class or to its most faithful servants. The peasants were definitely fighting against the English during 1857. This they were doing in the villages through their anti-indigo movements. Striking the planters they wanted to weaken the economic base of the ruling power. Therefore in their struggles there was a unique combination of diplomacy and strategy. Not only that, during the Great Revolt, the situation was really very tense all over Bengal and in the districts adjacent to Calcutta, including the Parganas, thousands of peasants assembled to join the sepoys. In 1858, a large number of peasants assembled at Baruipur (the Parganas), submitted a memorandum to the Magistrate demanding immediate release of all the prisoners. Even the rulers themselves admitted this country-wide unrest and said: "the districts immediately in the neighbourhood of Calcutta and even the Presidency itself, have been subject to periodical panics during the whole progress of rebellion."

"Hardly a single district under the government of Bengal has escaped either actual danger or the serious apprehension of danger."²⁹

The rapidly increasing strength of the peasants and the intensification of their struggles against vested interests became a constant headache to the government. In order to counteract "this great evil", the then Governor General and his advisers discovered a unique formula, which came to be known as the "Indian National Congress". From the statement of Allan Octavian Hume, the so-called father of the Congress, we know the real motive of the government. He said that thousands of reports warning the government about a serious mass upsurge poured into the capital from every corner of the country. Therefore he thought that something must be done without any delay and the starving people should not be given any chance to organise

themselves.³⁰ Thus the reactionary rulers and their reactionary Indian supporters joined hands to set up the Congress. But the millions of starving peasants and artisans could not forgive this entente. A spirit of revenge continued to burn in their hearts.

Throughout the 19th century, the educated and westernised Bengali "baboo" played a role which was both loathsome and ignoble. They supported and encouraged all the misdoings of the English. It was they and not the English who really betrayed their countrymen, and hampered the progress of the peasant movements. Yet our pundits appreciate their activities and describe them as messengers of the "Indian renaissance". The term renaissance means reawakening or rebirth—reawakening of the sense of humanity, fellow feeling, patriotism and sacrifice. Paradoxically, these qualities were not present in those so-called great men. Although they were well acquainted with the revolutionary ideas of the West, they carefully avoided their inner meaning and what they sincerely imported from Europe was Western feudalism. Previously they had been "babu" feudals, now they wanted to become sahib feudals. The net result of this so-called renaissance was the replacement of the Indian feudal way of life by its European counterpart. Rammohun, Dwarkanath, Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda, all those "heroes" of the 19th century served the British. It is a tragedy that Rammohun and Dwarkanath supported the indigo planters, encouraged their settlement in India, it is an ugly truth that "Rishi" Bankim Chandra opposed the peasant wars and Vivekananda identified socialism with Hindu Advaitabad. Although there were a few exceptions—(Harish Chandra Mukherjee, Dwarkanath Ganguly etc.), it was the real picture of the day.³¹

(To be continued)

²⁸ Reports of the Indigo Commission (1860), p. 5.

"Ichhamati" by Bighutibusan Banerjee.

²⁹ Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors by C. E. Buckland, Vol. I, pp. 67-68

³⁰ See note 1, pp. 378-379.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-215.

Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

SO, after all Mr Raj Narain's bubble has burst and with it truckloads of women's undergarments shed in the Rabindra Sarobar Stadium area. This, of course, is not news to me and my own conclusions as set down in these columns have only been borne out by the Commission of Inquiry in its report. But such is the power of propaganda in the hands of the 'National' Press that even hard-headed citizens who were all the way behind the UF had started doubting if there might not be something to it.

Freedom of the Press and speech, of course, is a wonderful thing. But then there is also the law of libel. Judging from the comments of some of the papers concerned they are not willing to accept the findings of the Commission and have hinted that they are based on ignoring valid evidence.

The question is: Why should anyone be free to libel a whole people or Government and get away with it? Should not Mr Raj Narain and others be made to answer in some way or other for their wild statements now proved to be false?

* *

The mela called the Calcutta cricket test ended after resulting in six deaths. Another test may or may not be held in Calcutta again. That would depend on so many other factors. Mr Jyoti Basu says that just because there are train accidents, people do not stop travelling in them. Nor did people stop going to the Kumbh mela in spite of the hundreds of deaths some years back. Train journeys, however, are often necessary. And going to melas, of course, depends on one's inclinations.

The Inquiry Commission will in due course produce its report as to how the unfortunate young men died and what was the immediate cause of the stampede. From past experience, it is going to do little good

and few lessons are going to be learnt from such tragedies.

No commission, however, is going to say anything about how our leaders, the legislators mainly, escalated the cricket fever. In their mad scramble for tickets to the match they behaved worse than the craziest young fan. No wonder thousands felt they had to get in somehow, anyhow, and devil take those in the front. It is too much to expect from our legislators, however, that they will learn to behave a little more responsibly as a class. Incidentally, how come they think that being elected gives them the right to free tickets to any show?

There is only one lesson that Rabindra Sarobar and the test match at Calcutta teach us. There is bound to be chaos wherever large numbers of people coming from different strata of society get together for some tamasha or the other with emotions excited. It is futile to rely on the police. No doubt police failure is there but then they are also human. To expect more of them is to give the force an importance that it does not deserve. The plain truth is that unless there is some self-regulating mechanism in such gathering disaster will always lurk round the corner. No increase in the police force can avoid it. The only thing to do is to discourage such mass hysteria and take the help of such elements as have some sense of discipline to bring a semblance of order into such gatherings which for all practical purposes are little better than mobs. And mobs will go wild at the drop of a hat. If the police experts have any doubts on this score they can take a fresh look at the big rallies with lakhs of people held from time to time with not a single incident or even at the Puja crowds controlled mainly by young men at the pandals, with policemen conspicuous by their absence.

* *

For politicians opening of sundry shows and functions is always a must. How they find the time to do anything else is always a mystery to me. In due course they probably con-

vince themselves that this is their main job in life and everything else can wait. Occasional inconveniences are soon forgotten, being just part of the game. The raised eye-brows, for instance, over the West Bengal Speaker, Mr Bejoy Banerjee's presence at the now famous 'Nite' at the Rabindra Sarobar. I had hoped that Mr Banerjee might have decided to go slow on accepting invitations to preside or inaugurate shows in future. But I was wrong.

The names of the West Bengal Speaker, Mr Banerjee and the Calcutta Mayor, Mr Prasanta Sur, were billed as added attractions for the opening performance of a popular circus in the city. We must not grudge them their free tickets, after all the hard talking they have to do. Circuses are not cricket matches, they go on for weeks and everyone gets the chance to go in. What intrigues me, however, is how and on what basis such things are decided. There was another circus, not much less popular, slated to start shows in the city. Was it that they never approached these worthies? Or was their request turned down?

Perhaps the Mayor feels that the Corporation being what it is, he should introduce to the citizens anything which promises a little enjoyment, even if the Corporation has no hand in it. So also felt the former Mayor, Mr Govinda Dey, who went about blessing such fanciful and exotic ventures as export of rassogollas. If Mr Sur is not careful, he might find his own image in the citizens' minds merging slowly with that of former Mayors, typified by Mr Dey.

* *

The craze for lotteries continues, with stalls for tickets issued by various State governments dotting important streets every few yards or so. Not to be beaten out of it, ingenious street hawkers who find it difficult to carry on a profitable trade have found their own solution basing it on the current craze. Small crowds can be seen here and there on busy streets around two or three people

with a lot of glasses, dishes and such things worth not more than a few paise each. For two-paise you can have a try and if you are lucky, carry away your prize. The draw never starts until the prize is covered; in most cases it is more, much more. So the hawkers gain much more than what they would by simply selling it. The business is much better also.

Already there is a betting booth in the city where you can have your bet without going to the Race Course. In time, perhaps, we shall have booths all over the city so that on the way from the market we can place a rupee on the day's favourite, just as people buy a lottery ticket along with groceries now. Truly great are the blessings of a mixed economy.

munication to it through the State Government.

The Soviet Embassy, the paper says, seems to have taken the Government of India for granted and, had not tragedy overtaken the project, it might have been completed or even inaugurated before the Government was aware of the fact. The lack of vigilance and co-ordination on the Indian side has been revealed and it is not easy to extenuate Soviet culpability. The fact that there is a U.S. information centre at Trivandrum is irrelevant as this was established during a previous period and is perfectly regular (this is strange logic but is certainly in order considering the U.S.-Birla relationship). It is quite clear that the Soviet Government would not tolerate similar conduct by the Indian Embassy in Moscow. It is equally puzzling that certain parties should almost seek to justify the Soviet action as the issue is not ideological (indeed?) but one of protocol and correct procedure. The Union Government's informing the Soviet Embassy that it should not proceed with the construction work is not enough; the External Affairs Ministry must impress on the Soviet authorities that violation of diplomatic norms would not be tolerated.

The Statesman finds the Soviet tactics elephantine and hardly credible. To have contrived to build the cultural centre without the Government of India's clearance is a piece of effrontery surely without parallel in recent times. There can be no two opinions on the immediate need to sharply remind the Embassy of its obligations as a foreign power in India and to instruct it to suspend its surreptitious activities in Kerala.

According to the Trivandrum Corporation the Soviet application for a building licence contained the assurance that the Centre's sanction had been obtained, though it did not ask for any documentary evidence of this. The State Government itself is also evasive on its role in this tortuous business though it has made no secret of where its sympathies lie. It is also strange how the External

The Press

Cultural Centre

READER

THE Russians seem to have bungled things a bit. The hawks who have been crying themselves hoarse over alleged Soviet espionage, never had it so good when it came to be known that a cultural centre was being built in Trivandrum without the Union Government's consent. While the Government's position is as yet not entirely clear, there can be no denying the fact that the Russians had adopted some underhand tactics, having kept a few key men informed of what they were about to do. One of them, Mr T. N. Kaul, unfortunately backed out at the last moment, as is apparent from his replies to Mr K. P. S. Menon's letters. It is, however, difficult to appreciate why Mr Menon should have conceded that at his age he was liable to confuse issues and forget things.

At the same time one also fails to understand the row that is being created over the incident. It is difficult to imagine the Russians organizing a full-scale KGB operation from the cultural centre at Trivandrum. Those who accuse the Russians of trying to start espionage activities should realise that Kerala would hardly have served the purpose. Even the Russians must have the brains to know that States like Uttar Pradesh or Maharashtra, which are of more relevance in the context of national politics, would have been far more suitable. And so far as propa-

ganda is concerned, it is hardly conceivable that the dull and insipid USSR official literature would lead anybody to the path of "socialist revolution". The same of course is also the case with the Americans but then they have other, more interesting, weapons.

The affair has however been rather embarrassing for the Prime Minister who has already been accused of closer than usual relations with the Russians. And while it is too early to predict, it should not be too surprising if on this count her entente with the CPI suffers a temporary setback.

The Press naturally has not lost this opportunity for attacking the Soviet Union and the irresponsibility of the Union Government. The *Hindustan Times* says that what must be of concern to the nation is the circumstances in which the project was sought to be pushed through by a foreign Government without due authorisation and apparently through direct contact with local municipal authorities. While the Kerala Government is not directly in the picture it is difficult to understand what persuaded the Trivandrum Corporation to issue the necessary building licence without either the Soviet Embassy producing the written permission that it claimed from the Union Government or an authorised com-

Affairs Ministry could have remained so ill informed of a foreign Embassy's activities and how even on being informed a fortnight ago it could remain so lethargic. The impression from all this gathers strength that where the Soviet Union is concerned the euphoria, to which Mr Dinesh Singh made a deprecatory reference the other day, is still a factor to be reckoned with; over the years the Ministry has bewitched itself into believing that partiality for the Soviet Union is the only way to demonstrate this country's neutrality against the United States. There is little wonder then that the Soviet Embassy seemingly considers itself placed in a special category beyond the reach of the usual norms of diplomatic behaviour. One conclusion that can legitimately be drawn is that the regulations governing Embassy activities should be re-defined. And another is that the External Affairs Ministry, and indeed the country,

would be all the better for shedding its apologists for the Soviet Union.

Rabindra Sarobar

The Ghosh Commission's findings in the Rabindra Sarobar affair have displeased quite a large number of people and certainly the Press. According to the *Hindusthan Standard* even now all controversies over the incident may not be set at rest. For the findings are based on the rejection of all evidence tendered before it which is rather intriguing. It would be interesting to know who doctored evidence, fabricated documents and why. The commission has also taken note of the disturbances that took place while the inquiry was on; were some people then interested in preventing the commission from discovering the whole truth? Anyway even if nothing worse than a brawl accompanied with rowdysim had occurred, that also is not a matter for congratulation.

Cricket

The free Indian Press revealed its character once again when none of the major dailies had the courage to editorially comment on the unseemly behaviour of the Australian cricketers at Eden Gardens, particularly on the last day when skipper Lawry had the audacity to assault a photographer in public. The papers which are always up in arms against "rowdyism" by left party volunteers, showed that the white skin still filled them with awe and respect. The most shameless of all has been the *Hindusthan Standard* of Calcutta which had no qualms in publishing a certificate for its cricket coverage from the Australian manager, the same Mr Bennet who had the previous day refused to allow his boys attend a party where Indian correspondents and photographers were present. After such cringing, it would be too much to expect any better behaviour from the Aussies.

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American Radicalism

SAM CLARK

INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF AMERICAN RADICALISM

By Straughton Lynd
New York: Pantheon, 1968.

MARXISTS believe that socialism is a synthesis of feudalism and capitalism. Capitalism is said to contain the seeds of its own destruction, not only in the sense that it possesses economic contradictions that cannot be resolved within the capitalist framework, but also in the sense that anti-plutocratic ideals, which once constituted part of the ideological superstructure of capitalism, will eventually be turned against capitalism itself. Just as "liberté, égalité et fraternité" formed the rallying cry for bourgeois revolutions, so these same ideals have come to play an important part in anti-bourgeois revolutions.

Various attempts have been made to show how radical ideals of eighteenth and nineteenth century liberalism have contributed to contemporary radical ideology. One such attempt is Straughton Lynd's *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*. The essence of his argument is that within the ideologies that gave rise to the American colonial revolution and the Civil War there could be found radical appeals that went far beyond these revolutions themselves. While it is clear that the American colonial revolution involved nothing more than the transfer of authority from British colonial administration to the landed ruling class and the rising business class in America. The rhetoric of the revolution implied far more. Lynd goes to great lengths to document the influence of English Dissenters on the architects of American independence. He points out that the Dissenters rejected the view that the social contract was based on constitutional rights, but instead believed

that the rights of man had an individual moral foundation and that the most basic human right was the right of individual conscience. He emphasizes that the architects of the American revolution were divided on this issue, some claiming that their constitutional rights had been violated, others claiming that any community had the right to overthrow a government that it perceived to be unjust.

Closely tied to this question was the issue of property rights. The Dissenters distinguished between property that resulted from a man's own labour and property that was engendered by unjust laws of inheritance. These views were echoed by Benjamin Franklin, and Jefferson introduced land reforms in Virginia designed to reduce the inheritance of properties. As Lynd states, the American revolution did not destroy private property, but did demythologize it.

In like manner, although the Civil War represented more than anything else the defeat of a feudal social structure by farming and industrial interests of the North, the political and moral debate on which this conflict came to focus had far wider social significance. Again the issues of individual conscience and property rights were central: the abolitionists claimed that no man-made laws could legitimize slavery and that no property rights could justify the ownership of human beings. But some radicals carried it even further. Thoreau began to suggest that private property rights of any kind were indefensible, that not just slavery, but capitalism too violated basic human rights.

On the whole there would seem to be a good case for arguing that contemporary American radicalism owes a debt to the American radicals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These radicals were liberals, not socialists, but their radicalism did contain universalistic elements that are relevant to current struggles and could be incorporated into socialist thinking. And yet if there

are liberal ideals that socialists would do well to accept, so too are there liberal ideals that they would do well to reject. What is lacking in Lynd's book is a discussion of the reactionary features of liberal radicalism. There is as well no consideration of the possibility that what is revolutionary at one stage in history may be reactionary at another.

Conscience

For example, the struggle for the right of individual conscience, to which Lynd gives so much attention, was actually part of a wider struggle against the social organization and methods of social control operating in pre-capitalist societies. The chief mechanism of such control lay in the monopolization of cultural interpretation by religious leaders, buttressed by the political support of monarchical and plutocratic states. The emergence of bourgeois economic activities was only possible if individuals could be freed from the restrictions of pre-capitalist social organization. Lynd points out that belief in freedom of conscience justified the rejection of slavery by the abolitionists, but fails to point out that the same belief also justified the pursuit of individual economic self-interest. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century to be revolutionary was to be against restrictions on individual freedom, but today the same can hardly be said. Radicals are now engaged in a struggle against dog-eat-dog individualism. It certainly cannot be denied that current revolutionary activity would not be possible if somewhere along the line people had not decided to resist the monopolization of cultural interpretation by elites, and perhaps radical liberalism deserves the credit for this step forward. However, at the present time, the evolution of a more humane society is being prevented above all by the unwillingness of individuals to accept responsibility for the well-being of others. So long as this unwillingness persists, an egalitarian society is impossible, and it is equality, not individual freedom, that

must be the central goal of contemporary radicalism.

Similarly, the struggle against inherited property has had both radical and reactionary implications. It is fair to argue, as Lynd does, that the repudiation of inherited property was a first step toward the repudiation of private property in general. But it must be remembered that the radical liberals rejected the right of inherited property because they believed that the only property to which man had a right was the fruit of his own labours. The whole notion of communal property had a different meaning for the nineteenth century radicals than it does, or at least should have, for radicals today; the former regarded property as a kind of common pool from which men could draw according to their efforts and merit. Cornelius Blatchly (whom Lynd terms a socialist) claimed that man had an inalienable right to "the full fruits of his own honest ingenuity and labour." Today this is exactly how the bourgeoisie justify their accumulation of wealth. They claim that the poor are poor because they are stupid and lazy. A more egalitarian society can only develop if we come to grant people rights to property simply because they are human beings, regardless of their intelligence or efforts. The incompetent have just as much right to a share of the commonweal as the competent. It is to this principle that socialism must remain firmly committed, because it is this principle that bourgeois ideology is most unwilling to accept. The bourgeois identification of desert with intelligence and effort has its origin in radical liberalism.

If socialism is a synthesis of feudalism and capitalism, it is important not only that it draws on what is progressive in capitalism, but also that it rejects what is reactionary. Straughton Lynd has advanced our understanding of exactly what it is in capitalist ideology that can be turned against capitalism and contribute to the construc-

tion of a new, more humane social order. But he neglects to caution us against what is reactionary in capitalist ideology. Most disturbing is the thought that his failure to do so says something about contemporary American radicalism. If Lynd himself is representative of this radicalism, then it is clear that revolutionary thinking in America at the present time is not all that revolutionary. It is still tied to the individualism of bourgeois liberal ideology.

The Ziegfield Splendour

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

ZIEGFELD Follies, the spectacular, plotless, musical revue, originally sponsored by the New York Showman Florenz Ziegfield, calls for a reevaluation. Was it a glorified leg-show or had it some real significance as the mirror of early American urban society? Ziegfield Follies was sort of America's belated answer to the English music hall, less socially conscious, but highly decorative and dazzling as a piece of showmanship. William Wyler's *Funny Girl* is a throwback to that glittering Ziegfield era with the screen bursting with a cavalcade of female beauties. A story of instant success, the film follows the career of Fanny Brice through different stages, her lift from the one-night stands to the Ziegfield legion. Her tempestuous love affair with the poker-wizard Nick Arnstein, a compulsive gambler, and the subsequent frustrations when Nick goes to prison on a charge of embezzlement also comprise a major part of the narrative. We have all the familiar environment of the usual Hollywood backstage musical and the first half of the film is a genuinely exhilarating screen comedy. Barbara Streisand as Fanny Brice steals the show right from the start when she sends everyone up in fillers on the opening night of a Ziegfield show by appearing as a pregnant bride (she stuffs a cushion under her wedding dress) in a most lyrical "Bride" number. Her

talents as a comedienne are everywhere manifest in all the sequences before the intermission and the songs are beautifully sung and excellently picturised. But the trouble starts from the second half of the film when the woman magazine elements take over and the style becomes ponderous and tedious, a great long slog through a slushy alley of childish sentiments. Even Wyler's attempts to infuse the film with a kind of modern gloss also fail miserably and the narrative lacks an effortless flow. The emotional balance of the story is lost and what remains is an ineffective study of shoddy, sloppy relationships of a maladjusted couple.

Letter

Gandhiites

Addressing a public meeting at Dum Dum Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan is reported to have said that the present plight of the common people is due to the rich. But what he did not point out was that the rich have become richer under the aegis of Gandhiite Ministers who have helped the capitalists and landlords to suck the blood of the poor.

Ghaffar Khan erred again when he equated Netaji with Gandhiji. Netaji rejected the idea of non-violence and asked the people to use any violent attack to achieve national independence. Netaji also visualised the present plight of the common people in the event of the country being run in the way the Gandhiite Ministers have been doing. Instead of preaching moth-eaten cliches on Gandhism Ghaffar Khan should turn to the man on the dais and tell the people to send the lingering Gandhiites to oblivion. How the people of West Bengal would carry out this task need not form the subject of lectures by any outsider, least of all Gandhiites whose philosophy had been rejected by the people of Bengal.

S. RAY
Hooghly

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