

NOTE

DR ROY AND HIS ADMIRERS

A B writes:

It is curious and intriguing that the CPI(M) has almost overnight turned itself into a worshipper of Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, who was the Chief Minister of Bengal from 1948 to 1962. What is usually referred to as the biggest achievement of Dr B C Roy was to get the approval of a big steel plant for Bengal. This steel plant was constructed at an obscure rural area of South Bengal that, following the construction of the plant, grew into a big city in course of time. The linkage effects of the steel industry and the facility of infrastructures (social overhead capital) led to the creation of many other industrial units, both state- owned and private, in the town. Dr. Roy also planned the Kalyani and Salt Lake townships, and had a design for a football stadium in Kolkata prepared by an Italian architect. Dr. B C Roy was a physician of unassailable and almost legendary fame, and even his political adversaries recognized his genius in this regard. As a politician he, however, earned fame as well as obloquy for his political views as well as administrative actions. During the thirties, he was the leader of the faction opposed to the Boses in the Congress politics of Bengal, and when, following the victory and subsequent debacle in Tripuri, Subhas Bose, along with his elder brother Sarat Bose, had to resign from the Congress Working Committee, B C Roy and P C Ghosh filled their place. The supporters of Subhas Bose, who included the communists as well, did not look upon the political role of Dr. Roy with admiration. Dr Roy was also one of the major figures that worked for the partition of Bengal and tried to defeat the plan of Sarat Bose and Abul Hasim for a united Bengal. Whether the division of a nationality on the basis of religion could be beneficial for the nationality as a whole is a moot question. According to Suniti Ghosh, who has keenly studied the subject of partition of Bengal, Dr Roy became very much dependent on the Birla group which desperately wanted to destroy the unity between the Bengali Hindu and Muslim middle classes in order to protect their business interests. B C Roy also allegedly took, in his election campaigns, the help of persons with heinous records of participation in communal riots.

During his tenure as the Chief Minister, two serious incidents of state repression shook West Bengal. In the early fifties, when a procession of women, organized to express solidarity with the political prisoners, was marching along the streets of Kolkata the police suddenly opened fire and four women, Amiya, Pratibha, Latika, Gita, a pedestrian youth Biman and a cobbler was killed. Latika was the wife of the communist leader Dr Ranen Sen. Kishan Chandar, the famous Urdu writer, described the episode with telling effect in one of his best short stories. This act of brutality received general condemnation; although the elitist *madhyabitta bhadralok* tried to defend police action by whatever stupid arguments they had at their disposal. Sometimes before that, the episode of Chandanpiri, the killing of a pregnant woman Ahalya by the police took place. Along with Ahalya, several other women were killed. Salil Chaudhuri and Hemanga Biswas immortalized this episode in their songs. The other event was the brutal lathi charge on peasants during the food movement of 1959. About eighty persons were beaten to death in the ghastly incident. On this episode, Bibekananda Mukhopadhyay, a renowned journalist and then editor of a Bengali daily, wrote in an article published on 7 September, "There are reasons to believe that there was a premeditated design to 'beat the agitators into submission'. Secondly it was decided to provoke violence through inhuman beating and repression and then the Government would unleash a reign of counter violence or terror. Thirdly, it was decided to launch a planned propaganda campaign (because the Government was, through the owners, in control of most of the

newspapers) suggesting that communists were responsible for all the acts of hooliganism, destruction and killing.” (Translated from Bengali). The police brutality displayed against the people tarnished the image of Dr B C Roy, although there was even then no dearth of unscrupulous persons among the educated gentry of Bengal to support the actions of the Government.

A few words about the industrialization programme of the Second Five Year Plan, of which enterprises like the Durgapur Steel Plant were a part, would not be out of place. In this industrialization plan, embodied in the Nehru-Mahalanobis model there was little thought about planned rural development and a change in the rural production relations, whatever the original suggestions of Mahalanobis. In the industrial sector, what was emphasized was a sort of planning and supervision under the control of a class of bureaucrats. It is a historical fact that the corporate big bourgeoisie of India dominantly appropriated the benefits of this industrialization. One may only go through the Bombay Plan to understand how the shrewd members of the bourgeoisie contemplated India's industrial development, and they did not feel unhappy that the Government was building up on their behalf what they themselves could not build up because they could not mobilize enough resources. Subsequent history has shown clearly that they took full advantage of it to fatten themselves. Regarding employment, it may be pointed out that some jobs for the educated classes were no doubt created and there was some growth of the tertiary sector, but in the thinking of Dr B C Roy, the problem of the massive disguised and open unemployment in rural Bengal did not have any place.

During that period, there were a lot of bogus (*benami*) land transactions by landlords for the purpose of circumventing the ceiling law with the active support of Congressmen, and the attitude shown by Dr B C Roy and his men was not at all pro-peasantry which led to the allegation that he was a pro-landlord politician. Such allegations, coupled with the police brutality of 1959, provided fuel to the electoral campaign of the Communist Party in 1962. One of the slogans was, "Down with killer Bidhan", formulated obviously with reference to the brutality of 31 August 1959. Yet Bidhan Chandra Roy is remembered by a considerable number of middle class Bengalis with regard owing to the fact that during his Chief Ministership the Durgapur Steel Plant was constructed and some jobs for the educated were created. There is a second reason, a non-political one, for this admiration. It was his fame as a physician. Now the CPI(M) wants to rehabilitate him by projecting him as the champion of industrialization in West Bengal. There is one justification for it. Dr Roy supported the big bourgeoisie covertly, while Jyoti Basu and his 'red' brigade want to promote their interests overtly. But this can hardly be a public excuse. The real design is that such fulsome praise of Dr B C Roy can be used to 'manage' some Congressmen and blunt the edge of the opposition to the CPI(M)'s so-called 'industrialization' programme. It has a striking similarity to the calculation behind sending the Imam of the Jama Masjid to Nandigram for the purpose of drawing away Muslims from the agitation. The Imam was managed, but that hardly improved matters for the CPI(M). Some Congressmen may also be managed, but the result is unlikely to be very great. One must feel sorry for the poor Chief Minister who, after presiding over the carnage in Nandigram, is now desperately trying to find ways and means to save himself from the backlash, because police and cadre brutality have boomeranged for him. □□□