

LETTERS

PROFESSOR TAPAS MAJUMDAR

It is now well known that Presidency College, Kolkata of the 1960s was at the center of a great radical turbulence. But at the same time, it could boast of a number of celebrated teachers who combined their proficiency in learning with love of students, who did not always approve of whatever their students did, but never took an ill-meaning attitude. Professor Tapas Majumdar, who died on 14 October of this year, was definitely one of the foremost of these teachers. Those who attended his classes and had the opportunity to talk with him must remember him for his mode of teaching and his soft nature full of affection for students. Without meaning the slightest disregard for others, this writer ventures the opinion that Tapas Majumdar was perhaps the best teacher whose lectures he had the privilege of attending. The contents of his lectures were rich, stimulating to better students, but at the same time intelligible to the worse ones. Students from mofussil or rural areas who scarcely had prior occasions to listen to lectures delivered solely in the English language did not find any difficulty in following him, so lucid was his style of presentation. This lucidity was displayed in his monograph *Measurement of Utility*, a standard text on the subject of the utility theory. His students included Amartya Sen, Sukhamoy Chakravarty, Amit Bhaduri, Sanjit Basu, Pranab Bardhan, Asok Guha, Mihir Rakhsit, Amiya Bagchi, Tapan Mitra and many others. Although a part of the academic establishment, he faced the student unrest of the late sixties and early seventies with exemplary calm and presence of mind, in the manner of a good liberal. After the founding of the Jawharlal Nehru University, he joined as the dean of the faculty of education there.

The political views of Professor Majumdar was never clearly spelled out, but whatever he wrote in recent years suggests that he was not in favour of that kind of industrialization that left no choice before Indian farmers except ouster from their means of livelihood. He noted with an aggrieved mind the events of Singur and Nandigram and in an article contributed to a leading English daily, quoted approvingly a remark made by (the famous Cambridge economist) Joan Robinson that Indian farmers have no choices. This clearly evinces his distance from the neo-liberal notions of development. It may be argued that he was a neo-classical, but it must be conceded that he was an open-minded neo-classical. In the second part of his career as an educationist, Professor Tapas Majumdar concentrated on exploring the relation between education and welfare, trying to draw conclusions from various empirical findings. This effort prodded him to write quite a few well thought-out articles and books.

One point may be noted about him. Indian academic environment being somewhat hierarchical, there was never any dearth of teachers who, although reputable for their scholarship and teaching qualities, loved to enjoy personal loyalty of their less famous colleagues and students. Professor Majumdar was, it should be emphasized, was an exception. He will continue to be remembered by his students.

Anirban Biswas, Birbhum

MINIMUM WAGES

The Rajasthan Campaign for Right to Information and Employment has recently initiated a movement for among other demands, a rise in the minimum wages for unorganised sector workers. In September truck yatras were taken out in 22 districts of Rajasthan. On October 2—Gandhi Jayanti Day—an indefinite dharna was started near the statue circle in Jaipur.

While the salaries of government officials and MLAs have almost doubled during the last few years, the minimum wages of workers have remained static at Rs 100 per day despite steep rise in the prices of essential items and food grains.

Other demands made by the CAMPAIGN include proper and timely payment at MGNREGA work sites, more MGNREGA work days, old age pension, and recognition of MGNREGA workers' unions.

Rajasthan workers fighting for minimum wages deserve wide support.

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