

frontier

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WAR AND PEACE

THE Russians were rather self-congratulatory in their first comments on the Vietnam cease-fire agreement: it was their missiles that brought down the B52s and their diplomatic support that played a decisive role towards the end. In comparison, Mao Tse-tung was modest: it was the Vietnamese who have helped the Chinese by fighting American imperialism for years. About this there should not be the slightest doubt now or in future. The Vietnamese, whatever their future alignments, have added a unique chapter to history.

There has always been speculation and controversy about the extent of Russian and Chinese aid to Hanoi. It has been pointed out by Vietnamese in private conversations that the Egyptians got much more, including some of the latest missiles and aircraft, though their operation was left in Russian hands. The Kremlin, perhaps according to some tacit super-power understanding, does not give offensive weapons of the most modern type to their allies for fear of direct confrontation with America. China is not in a position yet to offer such aid. What has distinguished her military aid is that it is free. In the absence of published data, it is not much use debating who gave the greater aid. What can be accepted is that, whatever the bourgeois world might say, it was not by cutting down on aid that Moscow and Peking forced Hanoi to come to terms. Maximum efforts were made to keep up the supplies after the mining of North Vietnamese harbours and the incessant bombing. What, perhaps, mattered was the realisation that in view of the monstrous air power the Americans always deployed in defiance of world opinion—in 1968 they did not hesitate to bomb Saigon and Hue to "save" those towns—there could be no outright military victory. The objective of the Easter offensive of last year was to demolish 'Vietnamisation', and deal crippling blows to the puppet army and not to capture cities and towns. It was a battle for the countryside and the Vietcong claim to have succeeded largely in that. But even then, they would not have minded if towns and cities had come under their permanent control. That would have made it impossible for Thieu and his government to stay on. This was not to be; the Vietcong have no aircraft and no widespread defence against attacks by all kinds of planes. There could thus be no military victory—unless other powers intervened directly. But Hanoi and the PRG never wanted

to push their friends to the brink of world war. Maybe the Americans, if pushed hard, would have backed away from the brink in terror, but can anyone bank on Nixon's sanity? Since military victory was not in sight, political and military issues were delinked.

Thieu would have a difficult task in fighting the elections; but these can be rigged to perfection in areas under his control, with the help of American advisers and experts. The 'laws' he has promulgated, the measures he is enforcing in defiance of clauses of the Paris agreement, the corrupting money that will pour in, will have a big impact, for a time. But his forces are demoralised and have no ideology. Left to himself, his doom is beyond doubt. Will the Americans play stand by? Even asking this question is silly.

Joint Sector

The industrial policy has always been a pet subject for the charlatan and pseudo-socialist in India. Clarity has never been its strong point, and the statement issued in this connection last Friday has not improved matters. The document represents an intellectual exercise of great subtlety but fails miserably as a recipe for growth. It removes some of the obvious anomalies that have persisted but has also created new ones. The cut-off point for a large house has been Rs. 35 crores according to the Dutt Committee and Rs. 20 crores according to the monopolies act; the figure has now been firmly set at Rs. 20 crores. The range of industries where large houses will be entitled to invest has been extended and more clearly defined. The scope of small and medium units and of new entrepreneurs has been spelt out with more precision. In general the statement has tried to impose fresh restrictions on both Indian and foreign big business. But there is an obvious lack of confidence in the approach. Whatever has been sug-

gested seems to have been suggested in a half-hearted way. And there is an apparent desire to please everybody and displease nobody. A vaguely worded section mentioning the possibility of the joint sector being resorted to "in special cases with regard to the production targets of the Plan" provides an escape latch which can always be used under embarrassing circumstances. The entire exercise has thus been reduced to a kind of shadow boxing, and the prescriptions for reform look as unreal as is the zeal of the policy-makers to correct the essentially bourgeois bias of Indian society.

Nothing underlines the contradictions and limitations of the policy better than the guidelines now laid down for the much talked about joint sector. Much has been said and promised and objected to in connection with the joint sector, and after the Ahmedabad AICC it looked as if the Dhar-Subramaniam brush could lead to bigger troubles. The joint sector has been variously projected as the deliverer of the Indian economy from the bondage of pri-

vate sector, as the panacea for all industrial ills and as the poor man's exclusive preserve. Indeed it has been intended to be so much to so many people at the same time that it has failed to be anything at all. It is said that it will try to help small and medium entrepreneurs to set up industries. But that has been the avowed goal of the various public financial institutions, including the nationalised banks, in the past few years. And would anybody claim that there has been a small-scale revolution in the country of the type that has helped to make Japan so strong? The fact is that in Indian business the small will never be allowed or able to grow so long as the big remain. If the government were serious about development of new entrepreneurs, it could have thought of something more realistic and feasible in the present milieu; it could, for instance incubate a unit up to viable conditions and then pass it to some small or new entrepreneur. The statement makes little effort to break any such new ground.

Late By 16 Years

The take-over of 404 non-coking coal mines by an ordinance has, as it always happens in such cases, produced some funny reactions among industry circles and in the capitalist Press. It becomes painful when one tries to defend something for which there is not a case. A president of a coal miners association said that he was presiding over the funeral of the industry but in fact the rite was performed long ago. While representatives of industry described the take-over as appropriative, the Press considered it unwarranted. Both tried to give the impression that there had been a gross breach of faith on the part of the Government. There is no reason why one should listen to the frenzied expressions of the mineowners who were known more as speculators than industrialists. What, however, one fails to

understand is why the Central Minister for Steel and Mines, Mr Mohan Kumaramangalam, appeared apologetic to the mineowners till the announcement of the management take-over. Why on earth did the Minister reassure the mineowners that their business would not be nationalised? The reassurance to the pillagers of India's most important fuel resource—coal will continue to occupy pride of place in spite of the new emphasis given on atomic energy by the Fuel Policy Committee—was not only ludicrous but also betrayed a lack of consistency. A few months ago, Mr Kumaramangalam said in the Rajya Sabha that mines with a "clean record" would not be nationalised; what has been said in justification of the take-over, however, goes to prove that there is nothing clean in the coal industry. For once one

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will be in agreement with Mr Sidhartha Sankar Ray that coal is the most corrupt sector of Indian industry. The Central Minister's prevarication gave the mineowners an opportunity to further denude the industry. One will remember that when the Government went to take possession of the offices of coking coal mines in October 1971, the only thing left was some office stationery. This has been repeated in the case of some non-coking coal mines also. It is not true, as the Government would have us believe, that the ordinance has come from the blue to the mineowners; a financial correspondent of a Calcutta-based daily wrote that the ordinance had not taken operators on the stock market by surprise.

There were differences in the Cabinet over the advisability of the take-over which is to bring the whole of the industry under the control of the Government. Mr D. P. Dhar had reservations about the economic soundness of the proposal but the Minister for Steel and Mines threatened to resign if he did not have his way. Only after Mr Kumaramangalam got the Prime Minister on his side that Mr Dhar gave in. One wonders why the Government should step in an area only after it has become sick because of the excessive greed of the private sector. In the case of coal, the Government should have eliminated the private sector when it became apparent that mining was not done properly, workers were not paid their dues and royalty was not paid to the Government. Incidentally, the nationalisation proposal was first mooted some 16 years ago. Non-coking coal mines have long ceased to generate resources from within and it is now beyond them to mobilise Rs. 100 crores needed to contribute its share of 60 million tonnes to the Fifth Plan target of 105 million tonnes. It is anybody's guess how the industry will fare under the public sector. The performance of coking coal mines has not been encouraging under Government control; production is down but prices have been stepped up to meet the demand of

the workers. In theory the public sector is better placed to carry out necessary reforms in the coal industry—integration of uneconomic small mines with the bigger ones, promotion of scientific mining, investment

in research and development, removal of transport bottlenecks and improvement of the lot of the wretched miners. But, there is always a big gap between theory and performance.

Bidhannagar To Bankimnagar

The striking semblance of Bankimnagar, venue of the All India Trade Union Congress session, to Bidhannagar, the last venue of the Indian National Congress session, may reasonably lead one to speculate whether both were not conceived by one and the same mind. The tamasha—the fair, the songs and dances, the socialist oratory, the coffee and the cashew nuts, the vindication of the common people—was of the same kind, in form and content. To be sure, Bidhannagar was made on a grander scale. But the planet is always brighter than the satellite—although both draw their energy from the super-powers. It cannot be said that the planet stunted in lending the satellite its brightest ray. It announced the take-over of the non-coking coal mines by the Government and promised not to ban strikes when the AITUC met for its 29th session. The big business too helped a lot by lavish advertisements and by erecting stalls and pavilions. But despite everything the tamasha did not click.

That is not to say that the satellite did not have any charm. It had—principally in its tallest peak, Mr S. A. Dange. He struck sublime notes studiously—he called the workers the Nag Basuki (the great snake) who carried the ruling class on its shoulders; he said the workers were equal in any enterprise to the employer, he promised that his party would drive away the ICS from the public sector, he demanded recognition of trade unions through secret ballot, a demand which, if not conceded, would lead to a one-day bandh! As is too often the case—the sublime was perilously near the ridiculous. Mr Dange suddenly lost his face

when he was reminded of the Kerala ban on strikes by non-gazetted employees, when he was declaring a crusade on the proposed ban in West Bengal. The explanation he drew forth was truly worthy of the CPI and Mr Dange. Mr Achutha Menon, the Kerala Chief Minister, was a representative of the proletariat and therefore the ban was correct in Kerala (socialism in one State?), while Mr S. S. Ray was a bourgeois and therefore the proposed ban in West Bengal was mischievous. The same bourgeois, Mr Ray, however was given a rousing reception on the AITUC rostrum in that very Bankimnagar.

It would be unfair of course to take Mr Dange by his words. The play is the thing. Otherwise Mr Dange can be accused of describing the industrialists of the country as feudal when he says that the industrialists were rapidly consuming all the increasing surplus value the workers were generating. But Mr Dange does not surely consider India a feudal State? Mr Dange again does not certainly believe in recognising every rival union—else why he and his comrades should dance in glee when the Congress unions, with the aid of the State power, crush the CPM unions in West Bengal? There is need for a willing suspension of disbelief if one has to enjoy a play. Let us therefore accept that the working class in India, who seems to be lying low at the moment, is really moving terribly fast. The great advance of the working class was demonstrated by Mr Dange through his slogans. Three years ago in Guntur Mr Dange raised the balloon with the slogan—Attack Monopoly. Three years later,

after a big stride according to Mr Dange, the slogan is : No Surrender to Monopoly. Isn't that an advance, Comrade ?

No wonder there was not much of the working class in Bankimnagar. Even the pavilions were erected at this trade union congress by the capitalists themselves—monopolies and all. Cervantes should have lived to see and believe it.

Corruption In University

Calcutta University may well be compared to a sick industry reeking with corruption and stalled by inefficiency. What its Vice-Chancellor, Dr Satyen Sen, disclosed at a Press Conference on February 1 was appalling. He was speaking on the report of the committee which had inquired into the working of the Controller of Examinations Department. Leakage of questions was admitted in respect of a particular examination in a past year, but this could hardly have been the only instance of its kind so far. In Calcutta quite a number of private tutorial institutions have been thriving for years on a possibly more general incidence of scandal. Both these institutions and the examinees' aids and guides with which the text-book market is annually flooded deal in tips on probable questions with "model" answers. The fortunes of these institutions and publications have depended on the successes of the bet. It has always been suspected, probably not without foundation, that officials of the Controller's Department as well as some of the paper-setters themselves have been involved in the racket. Of course, the teachers directly associated with such tutorial and publication business are the principal miscreants. But things could hardly have got to such a pass, (nor would it have been possible for this nauseating farce and swindle to go on so long) except with the connivance and collusion of a cross-section of

the University officials. This brings into question the whole system of teaching and examination which lends itself to such corrupt dealings and calls for its immediate overhaul. If the system has never been sought to be scrapped but only tinkered with the reason can only lie in an intricate tangle of interests. At one level, these interests are a mere hand in the lucrative pie, but at another and a more significant one, they are but part of the interests of the ruling class. Young people are deluded with hopes of material advancement through higher education, while only an infinitesimal fraction of their total number, often belonging to the richer strata, really make it—in spite of the system perhaps. The industry thus goes on grinding the souls of poorer youths and bringing profit to the guardians of the society and their underlings.

How resistant to change the present system is could be shown no better than by Dr Sen's disclosure that a suspected officer of the Controller's Department was punished by being transferred to a department much less accessible to corrupt practices. Did not that officer and many like him, who might be "doing mischief" in the Controller's Department, deserve an outright sack or at least a more drastic penalty than mere transfer from the source of iniquity? And what makes the Controller's Department such a sapper of moral virtues? Cases of tampering with marks have also come to light. As many as 19 tabulators found guilty of what has euphemistically been called "errors" have been relieved of their responsibility. It is shocking that experienced and learned teachers, who mostly are entrusted with the tabulation of marks, can be capable of such gross offence. It is doubtful if mere change of personnel in the examination department can begin to eradicate this evil. Dr Sen pleaded inability to carry out even the modest proposals of the inquiry committee on grounds of "paucity of funds". But the most simple of these recom-

mendations is to have at least three universities in place of the one he presides over. The sheer problem of numbers is terrifying. Think of a small department of a single university conducting examinations for 302,000 candidates in 1972 alone. Why does the Vice-Chancellor stoically resign himself to the impossible task of healing such a bloated, senile and sickly corrupt institution as Calcutta University has grown to be of late? If Government apathy, shortage of funds, equipment and personnel, morbid overgrowth, endemic inefficiency and malpractice are in the way, the least he can do is wash his hands of the whole damned business. But the glib manner of his explaining the large percentage of failure at examinations hardly prepares one for such courage of convictions from him. He admitted that classes and studies were disrupted throughout the terms preceding the examinations and yet these were held and most students sat for them expecting to scrape through by unfair means. This expectation being frustrated by the new method of examining scripts, most of the students failed. We all know that the colleges have to admit and send up students in large numbers to keep themselves going and the University has also a stake in sheer numbers. Neither can afford a cut back in these hard days. But what are we to make of a university and its affiliated institutions which take no responsibility for teaching their pupils, but only examine them at intervals and breed vice and corruption in the process?

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FEBRUARY 10, 1973

A Letter From Prison

(This letter was sent by a group of women prisoners who were arrested during the Ceylon Government's repression of the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) in April 1971. The letter was smuggled out in September 1972 and was translated from Sinhala into English by a member of the Ceylon Solidarity Campaign in London. The translator's notes appear in brackets. Parts of the letter have been omitted for lack of space.)

All the women taken into custody as suspected insurgents and kept in the Women's Section, Welikanda Jail, were stripped of their clothes and inspected. When we expressed our embarrassment we were abused in filthy language. Suspects were not allowed to obtain extra clothes from their parents and so could not wash the ones they were wearing. When we complained, we were given the white clothes and jackets normally worn by prisoners who have been convicted. We could not obtain the items which are essential for women (in their periods); as a result we went through untold suffering.

From dawn to dusk to dawn we were locked inside and even the windows were closed. Speaking aloud as well as laughing was prohibited. We were let out to queue up for food, and only then could we even drink water. Once most of us contracted diarrhoea; as they did not open the doors at night we could not get water to wash ourselves after going to the toilet.

The rooms were crowded and some had to sleep near the toilets. There were no facilities to brush our teeth or wash our faces; when we were let out to wash, we cleaned our teeth with powdered pieces of brick. To bathe, we had to use dirty water left by other prisoners and to bathe very quickly, starting at the first bell and finishing the moment the second bell

rang. We bathed from a tank with the aid of a tin smaller than a Lakspray (powdered milk) tin. By the time we had each poured two tins of water over our bodies the second bell rang and we had to finish. Sometimes, we had to return without bathing at all.

Later, we were allowed to send letters to our parents asking them to bring our clothes. We had to confine ourselves to listing the two or three things we needed.

As the number of detainees increased we were let out at 5 a.m. and allowed to stay out until 5 p.m.

Our food was brought in large, dirty buckets. It was mixed with rust and the gravy tasted of rust. The food itself was unpalatable, containing neither coconut milk nor chillies (essential for Ceylon cuisine). Sometimes there were maggots in the rice and some girls vomitted the food; others who refrained from eating it fell ill. When we could no longer bear our hunger we separated the maggots from the rice and ate the rice. Sometimes some of the girls received no food and had to share the meals of others. For about a week the rice was so full of sand and pebbles we could not eat it. Even a woman who had a baby a week earlier was given this food... After all this we demanded better food. A jail guard came to see us and we showed him the filthy buckets and bad condition of the food. When he scraped the top of a bucket with his finger, a whole layer of dirt came off on it. He admitted that the food and the bucket were unclean, but said the other prisoners ate such food... One day the Commissioner of Prisons came to see us and we again complained. After that the situation improved somewhat; the food was brought in clean buckets.

In the dispensary there were three bottles of medicine and a few tablets of Disprin and vitamins. For every

ailment these were what they prescribed. If someone suddenly fell ill in the night it was not possible to obtain treatment without screaming a long time for help, as the officers in charge were all sleeping. When the guards woke and we appealed to them they would promise to telephone. The guard responsible for giving the medicine usually came near the cell window and looked at the patient, even if she was unable to walk we had to carry her to the window, for they were not allowed to open the door after 5 p.m. When a doctor did arrive occasionally he would fail to examine the patient, he would ask her name, age, and the nature of her illness and then prescribe medicine. The Divisional Medical Officer examined only those patients who were seriously ill, and then rushed off. When anyone contracted an infectious disease she was placed in a solitary cell where there was hardly any fresh air and where her condition would grow worse. People with chicken pox or skin diseases could not even obtain a glass of milk (required by native medicine to cool the system) without screaming repeatedly. As the number of people arrested was so great and as all of us were housed in two or three small halls, there was not enough room for us. We had to sleep in discomfort, packed together and sweating in the heat. That was why there were so many illnesses.

We learned from the newspapers that there was a camp for about 500 women at Mirigama. We waited impatiently hoping they would transfer us there so that we would at least have sufficient room. In August 1971 some women were transferred. Those transferred were chosen arbitrarily by the officers, (so that) sisters, daughters and mothers were separated from one another. This caused much inconvenience to their relatives who were later allowed to visit, and added to their anxiety.

The camp at Mirigama was big enough to hold more than 500 persons, so we wondered why all 400 of us were not brought there. Instead,

small groups were taken from time to time. When we asked the officer in charge why all of us were not transferred, she said it was done to tame us... None of us knew why we had to be tamed, for there were no headstrong girls among us. Most of the girls left behind were those who had protested against various injustices perpetrated by the officials...

In the beginning there was unity among the prisoners and no one kow-towed to the officials. Later the officers persuaded some girls to become informers and to do menial work for them such as sewing their clothes, by promising these girls an early release. As a result disunity developed, and the officials took the opportunity to institute tyrannical regulations.

At Mirigama we are allowed to use the water pipes from 7 to 8-30 a.m., 11 to 1-30 p.m., and 4 to 5-30 p.m. In the whole camp there are 40 water taps. Apart from those in the kitchen and office only 23 are in working order, and of those, only 6 are for bathing and washing clothes. The other 34 are reserved for the authorities... The toilets have been blocked now for over four months, and in the whole camp there are only four. The stench is unbearable.

The officials behave in a very intimidating manner. They do not treat us as human beings. Because she made an error in sending a telegram (announcing her release to her parents) a girl who had been released from custody is still with us; the officials have not made arrangements for this innocent girl to go home...

Raped

(When we were arrested) a large number of girls were subjected to undue harassment, and quite a number were raped by police constables. Three mothers between the ages of 32 and 42 were raped. The arm of one of them was twisted until it broke; she has not yet recovered. These women were raped and molested in the presence of their children. Letters were branded on the arm of one of them, and her son was shot dead in

her presence. After taking this mother and her eldest daughter into custody the police set fire to their house. The woman's youngest son and daughter, aged 10 and 14 respectively, fled and hid in the woods. When they returned to the village in the evening, they were chased out of every house. (In fear of police reprisals many villagers dare not identify themselves with anyone even remotely suspected by the police.) We learned that the youngest girl was later shot dead at Wilpattuwa. Of four children only the eldest daughter remains alive; she is with us in this camp. Although the mother was released, we learned that she was later taken into custody again. Apparently the villagers beat her and turned her over to the police.

Four girls wearing military uniforms were arrested, stripped naked, and assaulted. Blows were struck at their breasts, elbows, knees, and thighs. Police constables kicked them with their boots; some received such serious injuries that they could not wear any clothes. These girls were arrested on the sixth of April and this incident took place at the Wit-tambuwa police station.

Another sister was arrested and molested at the Pannala police station; her clothes were torn off and she was beaten. When she was interrogated she was allowed to wear only her underpants, and burns were inflicted on her. Two men who were arrested with her were badly beaten; Pannala police then handed over the two men and the sister to the Negombo police, who subjected them to further atrocities. Police jumped on the woman and trampled her; her fingers were twisted and fractured. The men accompanying her were stabbed and then their hands were cut off, after which petrol was poured on them and they were burnt alive. (The names of this woman and others mentioned later are given in the letter but have been withheld by the Sri Lanka Human and Democratic Rights Organization to prevent further victimization.)

Another girl was raped at Weligama police station. Yet another

was made to sit on the bonnet of the jeep while she was being brought to the police station; she suffered severe burns from which it took her a long time to recover. Another sister was... by Colonel Ranatunga. Two more girls were subjected to enormous suffering; bottles and batons were stuck inside their...; they have tried to kill them; it is a miracle they are alive today...

At Anuradhapura police station a safety pin was stuck into the hand of another girl; today she is suffering from nervous breakdown. About 25 persons were killed at Anuradhapura. There also a girl was raped and then shot dead after her body had been mutilated.

An 11-year-old girl taken into custody at Deraniyagala police station was beaten to obtain information. While being assaulted she was asked where her brothers were. She received several blows on her head and was kicked around and thrown up into the air.

Another sister who could not take any more torture tried to commit suicide by slashing her throat with a blade. She was almost dying when taken to hospital. The police shaved off the hair of two other sisters at Gokaralla; they are in this camp and their hair has not yet grown back.

There are very few girls here who have not been beaten and harassed by police. In most cases their brothers were killed in their very presence. Here we mention only the indignities suffered by women, but more brutal things were done to the men, which the women were forced to witness. Two other girls here were raped by the Veyangoda police; yet another was raped by two policemen. These girls are ashamed of what happened to them and do not want to disclose it; they say, however, that they can identify these policemen and even know their names.

Special Branch Station

This was a dreadful place. Everywhere one could hear people screaming in agony. We saw a lot of people lying on the floor, badly bea-

ten; they were muttering in low voices, trying to express their anguish. In such circumstances innocent girls like us became confused and speechless. If we answered their questions differently from what they expected, police officers tried their strength on us and threatened our virginity. When we tried to protect our chastity beatings and untold sufferings were inflicted on us, including pins stuck under our nails and into our breasts. Whatever the police required was recorded in English and we were forced to sign irrelevant and inappropriate things to protect our lives and chastity. That was how statements were recorded on the Fourth Floor (commonly reputed to be the torture chamber of the secret police in Ceylon). What we heard there was truly frightening. The way they beat up the men in the presence of the girls was horrifying—mostly on the chest and kidneys. Some girls among us have seen men hung by ropes and beaten. Some men were so badly beaten they were not aware that their sarongs had slipped off them (leaving them naked).

When we walked past one room we heard screams and there was blood all over the floor; pools of blood were covered with newspapers.

We were asked to go and see the place where the prisoner Dodampe Mudalali jumped to his death from the fourth floor of the C.I.D. building four years ago. (It is alleged, however, that he was pushed from a window.)

We were told that the number of people who left that building was much less than the number who arrived there. The matron who was supposed to be looking after us gave us a lot of trouble; she exaggerated the horrible things that happened in order to frighten us.

We swear that the account we have given is true and accurate. For lack of space, we cannot write many other things.

Our agent at Varanasi
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FEBRUARY 10, 1973

Kerala

A Team Of Fiddlers

RAMJI

THE style and spirit of administration in Kerala could be put in a nutshell: the Ministers, drawn from each of the United Front parties, with the CPI leader as chief, are specialising in fiddling while the State is burning. Non-administration is the keynote of the administrative technique. The Ministers become alive to their duties only when it is question of abusing their authority and resources, and all this thanks to the conspiracy of silence maintained by the big vernacular press. The Ministers are adept at misusing their authority without even a figleaf of propriety. This was thrown into sharp relief during the recent by-elections in the State. The most bitter struggle was in Parur constituency near Ernakulam, which used to be held by a Congress candidate whose death caused the by-election. Mr A. C. Jose, the Mayor of Cochin and younger brother of Mr A. C. George, Union Deputy Minister for Foreign Trade, was the prestigious Congress candidate, pitted against whom was the Marxist Independent, Mr Varkey Painadan. No less than four Ministers, the Home Minister, the Food Minister, (both Congress), the Industries Minister (CPI), and the Union Deputy Minister conducted the election campaign personally and no cost or effort, governmental and those of vested interests, was spared to pull the Congress candidate through. There was very heavy mobilisation of police and doubts began to arise as to whether this was a prelude to staging another West Bengal type election. Even top police officers went about openly canvassing votes. Money flowed like water. One industrial unit engaged in making tyres contributed not less than 50,000 to the Congress election fund and this was just a drop in the ocean. But the Congress and the prestigious

candidate lost to the Marxist Independent, by a margin of over 6000 votes. This was a stunning blow to the Congress and CPI, the main propagandists in this constituency. Further north, at Nileswar, the Marxists retained their Assembly seat, defeating the Congress candidate by over 6000 votes, showing that they had improved their position there since the last elections. Here also no less than four State Ministers were in charge of the election campaign and the entire State machinery and resources were used to wrest the seat from the Marxists. In the third by-election, that for the Lok Sabha in the Manjeri constituency in Malapuram district, a traditional Muslim League stronghold, the Muslim League candidate, Mr Koya, the Education Minister, won, but with a considerably reduced majority when compared to the last elections there. Here the situation was highly curious, to say the least. The Congress (and the CPI and the United Fronters) was obliged to resort to the ludicrous exercise of campaigning for the victory of a Muslim League candidate in the Lok Sabha where the Muslim League is in the opposition! But, anything goes in Kerala since Indiraji herself has decreed that the League in Kerala is different from the League outside Kerala, although this has been openly reputed by the League leadership.

The election of Mr Koya to the Lok Sabha along with the death of the Muslim League President, Mr Thangal, has started a crisis inside the League. Koya did not want to leave his ministerial berth for the anonymity of New Delhi. But Thangal forced it on him. Now that Thangal is dead, Koya is likely to have second thoughts which will be resisted by other aspirants in the League slaving for party influence through ministerial status.

A highlight of the administration recently was the royal welcome at a cost of over Rs 7 lakhs accorded to Mrs Indira Gandhi who paid a flying visit to Kerala to release the first batch of houses in the one lakh housing scheme for the poor, labelled by the Public Relations Department as the

"houses of the poor, by the poor for the poor". It was characteristic that the batch of houses was presented by the leading contractor of Kerala to the Prime Minister and the happiest man was Mr M. N. Govindan Nair, the CPI Minister for Electricity, whose pet scheme it is. In this case Mr Nair behaved as if Mrs Gandhi was the reincarnation of Lenin himself. The

air is thick with one lakh houses; the Government has this as the sole talking point in its supplements in such prestigious publications as *Link*. The instant verbal revolution would have it that Kerala has shown the way by putting up one lakh houses already, though in reality, not even a thousand have been put up. And the life of them and the coming ones is uncertain.

Shoddy work and steep payments with money got through voluntary extortions finance this tughlukian scheme of the CPI Minister. In the teeth of the one lakh houses and the visit of the PM to the constituency for launching it, the Congress failed in the Parur by-election.

Character Of The Soviet Economy Today—I

MONI GUHA

IS the Soviet Union still a socialist country? Or is she really reverting to capitalism? These questions are raised not only in the capitalist press but also by people who honestly consider themselves communists by conviction and once loved the Soviet Union almost religiously. A sizeable portion of these people say that although the present leaders of the USSR are revisionists, the social system there has not undergone any structural change for which it can be called capitalist. Some people say, a socialist society, particularly a classless socialist society like the Soviet Union, cannot revert to capitalism from inside peacefully and gradually as this contradicts the very law of social development. Again, some other people say that a 'capitalist type of superstructure' can develop on a socialist structure. (Joan Robinson etc.). Some others altogether deny the fact of emergence of a classless society in the transitional period to justify the restoration of capitalism from inside peacefully and gradually.

Of course, all these arguments are somewhat partial and one-sided and as such are somewhat mechanical, not dialectical. Emergence of a classless society is the result of a single process of socialist construction. Classless society does not and cannot emerge suddenly, overnight, nor through any other independent process. In the Soviet society the

exploiting classes were disorganised and disarrayed economically, politically, socially and organisationally and there remained only *elements*, not classes. The disorganised and disarrayed elements had no chance of reconsolidating themselves as a class. Undoubtedly, the division between mental and physical labour, the difference between the city and village, the difference between workers and peasants and industry and agriculture remained and hence remained the class instincts and habits as well as class desires. But the *base* upon which these instincts, habits and desires take material shape no longer existed. These habits etc were the superstructural weaknesses of the classless society in its initial period as the "birth marks" of the capitalist society from whose womb it had just emerged.

Besides these, there were, of course, weaknesses in the structure itself also. The complete invalidation of commodity-money relations could not be effected in Soviet society and as such the operation of the capitalist law of value, however subordinated, was an *objective* impediment to smooth socialist sailing. In a socialist society commodity-money relations and the operation of the capitalist law of value are double-edged weapons. It can be used and utilised in favour of socialism, provided there is the will and correct proletarian leadership of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Again, it can be

used and utilised in favour of restoration of capitalism if the leadership wishes so. The disorganised and disarrayed *elements* of the exploiting classes may take and naturally do take advantage of each and every wrong step of the dictatorship of the proletariat and may reconsolidate themselves first as a group and then, if opportunities permit, as a class. "This, above all, concerns such economic factors as group or collective form of property and commodity circulation... it would be unpardonable blunder not to see at the same time that *these factors* are already beginning to hamper the powerful development of our productive forces," said Stalin in his last book, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*. Thus the emergence of a classless society with weaknesses in the structure and superstructure does not preclude the possibility of re-emergence of classes.

More, when uneven development is the absolute law of capitalist imperialism and socialism in one country is a living fact, international trade and commodity market remain as such even if the commodity-market relations are completely done away with in the internal relationship of a socialist country. In that case also, it is a question of suitable *policies* by the leadership of the proletarian dictatorship so that the capitalist law of value of the international market may not, in any way, influence the internal life

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and relation of the socialist society.

In Stalin's time internal prices remained isolated from the world market and the nominal gold value of the rouble had little relation to internal prices and a barrier was erected between the domestic and world prices as well as between the money serving the home market and that used in foreign trade transactions. This policy of Stalin's time has been abandoned by the present leaders of the Soviet Union and they have tied up the internal price policy with the movement of world price. In Stalin's time, foreign trade, though pushed vigorously, was not allowed to defend the economic development of the Soviet Union on the world market as is being done now.

The social laws act almost in a way like those of natural laws. One can divert them, restrict their spheres of operation, use and utilise them in our favour but cannot invalidate their operation so long as their material bases, their social roots are there. The commodity-market relations, internal and/or external, are the material, objective basis of the operation of the capitalist law of value in socialist society. The superstructure which still carries the "birth marks" and the old habits is the subjective factor. Besides, thought and consciousness always lag far behind material development. So the "factors" of which Stalin spoke may raise and do raise their heads with all their fangs at the weakest moment of the policy of the proletarian dictatorship independently of the wishes of the people and the policy-makers.

With this background, the changes in the Soviet economy since 1953 will be discussed in this paper. The paper will confine itself to the internal changes only and will not discuss international trade, finance, aid, joint exploitation of labour and resources.

Socialist Man

At the 22nd Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev in his Report of

the C.C., CPSU, said, "our homeland has entered the period of full-scale construction of communism along the entire broad front of giant undertakings", and in the same report elsewhere he said, "It is important that the growth of public funds properly combined with the *principle of material incentives*". Four years after his report and after the 1965 March and September plenary meetings of the CPSU an editorial in *Pravda*, on January 14, 1966 said: "The economic changes signify:—

"Creation of necessary conditions for more consistent application of the socialist principles of providing *material incentives* in production in combination with moral stimuli to work."

The two quotations signify that full-scale construction of communism begins with the application of material incentives and material incentive is the chief motive force for full-scale construction of communism. These have been said and done in the name of "socialist principle" and in the name of Lenin and Leninism. What did Lenin say about material incentive vis-a-vis communism? "Communism begins when the rank and file workers begin to display a self-sacrificing concern ... which do not accrue to the workers *personally* or to the close 'kin', but to their 'distant' kith and kin i.e., to the society as a whole, to tens and hundreds of millions of people united first in one socialist state and then in a union of Soviet Republics". Further, "communist labour in the narrower and stricter sense of the term is *labour performed in gratis for the benefit of the society*, labour performed not as a duty, *not for the purpose of obtaining right to a certain product*, not according to the previously established and legally fixed rates, but *voluntary labour* irrespective of rates, *labour performed without expectation of reward*, labour performed out of a habit of working for common good and out of a conscious realisation (because of habit) of the necessity for the common good—labour as

the requirement of healthy organism." (The Great Beginning).

The present Soviet leaders are, therefore, violating the theory and practice of socialist man conceived by Lenin. They are 'upholding and practising the theory of Economic Man of Adam Smith. The economic man, naturally, cannot build even socialism, let alone communism. The economic man can only build private property instincts, self-interest, personal gains etc. Blaming and criticising Stalin and Stalin's discouragement of material incentives and encouragement of social consciousness Khrushchev said, "Disdaining the material needs of workers and emphasizing mainly enthusiasm and social consciousness, social and moral forms of incentives and rewards, he hampered the development of production and of raising living standards of the workers. This had negative results in the internal politics and international politics." The *Pravda* editorial referred to earlier, wrote, "It is not the aim of the communists to bring happiness to the coming generation by subjecting the present generation to *ascetic self-denial* (obviously hinting at China). They call for preparing a better future for the succeeding generation and at the same time do everything to make life happier and better for contemporaries." While Lenin advocated self-sacrifice and labour in gratis, the present Soviet leaders jeer at Lenin by calling it "ascetic self-denial".

Bourgeois economists and sociologists in general and Adam Smith in particular said that it is the inherent nature of man to give something only in exchange for getting something more beneficial. That is why every man is Economic Man with self-interest and preservation of self first. Lenin in the same book referred to above said, "We shall solemnly and firmly pledge ourselves to one another to make every sacrifice, to hold out and win in this arduous struggle against force of habit—to work without relaxation for years and decades. We

shall work to eradicate the accursed rule, 'Every man for himself and good for us all', to eradicate the habit of regarding work only as duty and of regarding as legitimate such work as is paid for at certain rates. We shall work to inculcate in people's mind, to convert into a habit, to induce in the daily life of the masses the rule: 'all for each and each for all', the rule 'from each according to his ability to each according to his needs', gradually but steadily to introduce communist discipline and communist labour."

This was on May 2, 1920. Today the present leaders of the Soviet Union, blaming Stalin for treading the path charted by Lenin, reintroduce in Soviet life "Every man for himself and good for us all".

One can easily conceive, without going deep into the economics of the Soviet society, what kind of society the present leaders of the Soviet Union are building—communism or capitalism.

Materialist Conception

"In political economy the production relations of socialism were for a long time considered quite abstractly as relations between the individual members of socialist society and society as a whole. But actually the relations of man with society are least of all direct when man acts as producer. Man enters into direct relations with society most frequently not when he acts as producer, but when he acts as a member of society, receiving remuneration or benefit from public funds, participating in social life etc. When Man acts as producer he primarily comes in contact directly with the enterprise and only through the enterprise with society. In political economy little attention was paid to these concrete forms of production relations—the relations between enterprise and the State, and between enterprises and their personnel. The starting point for improving the entire system of incentives is to improve relations be-

tween the enterprises and the society as a whole."

These apparently innocent lines are from an article "New elements in economic incentives" by one B. Sukharevsky, published in *Voprosy Ekonomiki*, no. 10, 1965, and reproduced in *Soviet Economic Reform, Main features and aim*, published by Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow. If the bagatellian sentences are paraphrased it comes to: (a) Man's relation is not determined by the system of production but by the system of distribution; (b) Man's direct relation with man is the enterprise where he works, so not the society but the enterprise is the basic unit, the improvement of which is basic to man, which will indirectly improve the society; (c) So long political economy failed to discover this concrete relation, now it has been "discovered" by the Soviet economists and sociologists and such a system of incentives must be enterprise-wise.

The entire thing is against the materialist conception of history enunciated by Marx, Engels and Lenin. One need not go through the chapter on Co-operation in Vol. I of *Capital* in order to understand the anti-Marxian stand of the above quotation. Marx, in criticising the Gotha programme, said, "Quite apart from the analysis so far given it was in general a mistake to make a fuss about so-called *distribution* (italics by Marx) and put the principal stress on it". "In production", Marx said, "men not only act on nature but also on one another. They produce only by co-operating in a certain way, and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections, and relations with one another and only with this social connections and relations does their action on nature, does production take place." (Karl Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I). Man is a social being and he establishes social relations. At different times, these operate in different concrete ways. These concrete ways are the

manifestation of different modes of production. As such concrete ways are neither primary nor principal. But to the present economists and sociologists this concrete way is the principal determining factor of social relationship against which Marx warned not to "make fuss". Once relation between man and man was direct and that is the true relation built through the process of production. In course of time various kinds of walls emerged, among which money became the predominant one. Relation between man and man became mystified and began to be expressed through money, through exchange. Money became the cash nexus of society. As people create idols with straw and clay and paint them with proper colours and then worship them as gods, though they are his creation, money, though created by man to meet his social needs, becomes the master. Marx called this fetishism. It is the task of the materialists to clear the mists and the wall that has been created between man and man and re-establish the true direct relations of the social beings and do away with the fetishes, and make man master. Here lies the significance of the discovery of the law of materialist conception of history. But the Soviet economists and sociologists, discarding this important and significant side of the materialist conception of history, are re-introducing the idealist conception and historical idealism and creating more mists between the social relations of man advocating enterprise as the basic unit of social relation from where man gets remuneration.

Why was this unique "discovery" in political economy needed? Why did the Soviet economists suddenly discover that "in political economy little attention was paid to these concrete forms of production relations"? It was prompted by the urge to restore capitalism step by step in the Soviet society; first by introducing enterprise-wise ownership. The Soviet economists and the Soviet economic reform have tied

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the remuneration, bonus etc. of the workers and directors of an enterprise to profit. In doing so they had to discard Marxism and introduce and "discover" a new theory. In a socialist society social profit or socialist accumulation is quite a natural thing and nobody has any reason to object to it. But if the earning by individuals of more income through an enterprise is linked with profit, if enterprise is made the basic unit of earning more income, it no longer represents socialist accumulation or social profit. It invariably gives rise to competition between the enterprises, a capitalist urge to earn more at the cost of others and simultaneously it widens the inequality of income and standard of living and leads to revival of classes in society.

Capitalist Law of Value

To have a clear and scientific understanding of the real character of a socialist society, it is imperative to study and investigate firstly, the operation of the capitalist law of value there; secondly, whether the sphere of operation of the capitalist law of value is gradually narrowing down and is in the process of eventual invalidation or gradually widening its sphere and is in the process of eventual reassertion; thirdly, whether the capitalist law of value has again become the regulator of production which had ceased to be the regulator in Stalin's time; and fourthly, what is the attitude of the present leaders of the Soviet Union towards the operation of the law of value in a socialist society—is it contradictory and an impediment to the planned socialist economy or supplementary and necessary instrument for the operation of the law of planned socialist economy?

The last point will be discussed first. It is an undeniable fact that the building up of a socialist society is a long drawn process. After a socialist revolution, the country concerned naturally inherits non-socialist sectors, in spite of seizing the commanding heights over the vital and key industries, commerce and

finance. These non-socialist sectors operate in accordance with their appropriate objective laws. As these take place under the general regulation and control of the commanding heights of the economy of the socialist sector, they can neither dominate nor regulate the national economy as a whole. The dictatorship of the proletariat by its economic as well as political power gradually weakens it in order to invalidate eventually the non-socialist sectors and bring the whole national economy ultimately under socialist planning. This is the task practically of the whole of the transition period. As such, throughout this period, though the capitalist law of value operates together with the law of planned socialist economy, it does so in a very restricted sphere and under the general regulation of planned socialist economy. The laws of movement of the commodity-money economy and the laws of movement of planned socialist economy are both objective laws. Consequently the laws of planned socialist economy are affected by the movement of the laws of the non-socialist sectors to the extent of their existence and influence.

It is clear that socialist planning and uninterrupted forward movement of the law of socialist economy are not compatible with the operation of the capitalist law of value. But compatible or not, it will go on operating so long as non-socialist sectors remain, so long commodity-money relations remain. So the quarrel is not over the operation of the capitalist law of value in a socialist society in the transition period, but over the question of its *mode of operation and regulation* and also over the question of adoption or non-adoption of effective measures to curb, restrict and eventually eliminate the non-socialist sectors and commodity-money relations, thereby invalidating the operation of the capitalist law of value altogether from the social life.

Stalin, in his *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* said, "Com-

rade Sanina's and Vanzher's basic error lies in the fact that they do not understand that the role and significance of commodity circulation is incompatible with the prospective transition from socialism to communism. They evidently think that the transition from socialism to communism is possible even with commodity circulation, that commodity circulation can be no obstacle to this." Stalin, then advising the introduction of a "products-exchange system" with the collective farms further said, "Such a system, by contracting the commodity circulation, will facilitate the transition from socialism to communism," and will "preclude the conversion of products into commodities and with it, their conversion into value."

That the operation of the capitalist law of value is incompatible with the operation of the law of planned socialist economy is neither recognised nor accepted by the present leaders of the Soviet Union and here lies the root of their fundamental departure and desertion from the path of building socialism and advancing towards communism. Here lies the basic point of division between the communists and revisionists as the question of building socialism is not an academic one. The Soviet leaders do not take any practical measures, economic and administrative, to weaken, curb and ultimately eliminate the basis of operation of the capitalist law of value. Nobody objects to the utilisation of commodity-money relations so long it is a compelling necessity, but to speak of such relations as a necessary instrument of socialist society is not only going too far, but a definite surrender to a capitalist instrument.

With the recognition of the capitalist law of value as a necessary law of the socialist society, the present Soviet leaders have taken measures since 1953 by which they have extended the spheres of its operation enormously. They not only advocate and practise the capitalist law of value as a necessary instrument in socialist society, but also say that

instead of being an impediment, it "supplements" the law of planned socialist economy. In *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*—a manual meant for the world Marxist-Leninists, they write, "But how is socialist planning compatible with the law of value since the former depends on another law, the law of planned proportional development?"

"Experience shows that it is perfectly possible for the two laws to operate together, because they do not contradict but supplement each other."

With this unique theory of "experience shows" Leontiev—the erstwhile reputed Marxist economist, writes in an article in *New Times* (No. 12, December 1967), "Practice which is the best criterion of truth, has debunked the theory of the 'rudimentary' nature, role and place of CMR [commodity-money relations] in a socialist economy." Further, "With the development of the socialist system and perfecting of its production relations, CMR far from vanishing play a substantial part as one of the economic instruments of socialist planning."

True, the law of value operates together with the law of planned socialist economy during the transition period. Also capitalism exists together with socialism due to the operation of the absolute law of uneven development of capitalist imperialism. But do these mean "perfect" relations, non-antagonistic relations? Do they mean that one is necessary for the existence and development of the other, that one supplements the other?

The present Soviet leaders with their revisionist attitude and practice have brought some significant changes in the Soviet economy in

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the name of economic reform as a result of which basic structural changes in production relations have occurred. The Soviet economists also could not conceal this fact. One economist says, "The measures discussed in the September plenary meeting [1965] are quite different from all those past measures. *These measures will not only influence the structure but will also bring basic changes in the sphere of economic relations.*" (Soviet Economic reform).

All this reminds one of what Lenin said in explaining the causes of degeneration of the German Social Democratic Party—one-time leader of the international working class movement—the party of Marx and Engels. "The general public know that German Social Democracy is regarded as a model of Marxist proletarian policy and tactics, but they do not know what constant warfare the founders of Marxism had to wage against the 'Right Wing' (Engels' expression) of the party. And it is no accident that soon after Engel's death this concealed war became an open one. This was an inevitable result of the decades of historical development of German Social Democracy." (Lenin—*on Britain*). Exactly the same thing can be said of the CPSU. If anybody carefully follows the history of the "concealed war" of the 'Right Wing' of the CPSU, especially from the period of introduction of collectivisation and five-year plan to the three important "warfares", one with Varga in 1947-48, the second on the problems of science and philosophy and the last one on the economic problems of socialism and other relevant questions of war, peace, co-existence international politics etc. it would not be difficult to find out the causes of the inevitable result of the decades of historical development of the CPSU immediately after the death of Stalin, who to his last day was a continuer and developer of Marxism-Leninism.

(To be continued)

Book Review

A LITERARY MISCELLANY

By Taraknath Sen,

Rupa & Co. on behalf of

T. N. Sen Publication Committee.

Rs 18/-

THOSE who believe that the publication of an anthology of T. N. Sen's writings will put an end to the exasperating myth making about the essential T. N. Sen will be shocked to know that S. C. Sengupta, the editor of the anthology under review, has done all he could in his short memoir to sanctify the legend that was T. N. Sen. He seemed rather happy to hear a pupil of T. N. Sen observe that 'the man was gone but the legend would remain'. It seems that Prof Sengupta cares more for the legend than for the man; for he says of Prof Sen what Voltaire said of God—if he had never existed we should have to invent him'. The implication probably is that T. N. Sen was more an abstract idea than a human being, and that the historical necessity of his role in Presidency College was like that of God in the universe. Indeed, Prof Sengupta's memoir which is an irrefutable testimony of his amazing capacity for idealisation becomes thoroughly enjoyable if one reads it with willing suspension of disbelief. For example, he would not like T. N. Sen to be 'great' only as a teacher or as a scholar (his greatness in these roles is unquestionable), so the great teacher at the lectern is turned into the kind of a boss who is 'qualitatively different' from the benevolent feudal masters and thus, as Prof Sengupta seems to imply, baffles the Marxists. This is not all. 'The insurgents (Prof Sengupta's epithet for the Naxalite revolutionaries) had so much respect for him personally that they chose to leave him and his Library alone'. It is strange that the editor should try to vindicate the greatness of a scholar like T. N. Sen by comparing him with the unemployed youth of today: 'Will modern young men, rightly

clamouring for jobs, *realize* (my italics) that Taraknath Sen saw lean years of unemployment and under-employment?' More shocking, perhaps, is the way Prof Sengupta, himself a renowned critic, has called attention again and again to Prof Sen's 'spectacular performances' in the examinations. All this is enough to make one feel that something must be wrong with the critical apparatus of our renowned academics or the system that has produced them.

It is amusing that in order to remove 'confusion about the main facts' of T. N. Sen's life, the editor mentions the name of the Ayurvedic doctor who treated T. N. Sen, and even the name of the man who took him to the doctor. But nowhere does Prof Sengupta care to say anything about Taraknath's political views—his reaction to Partition, his attitude to the Independence movement—and his thoughts on the colonial system of education.

Last of all, the analysis he has offered of T. N. Sen's style and critical method fails to convey their exact nature, and then he reminds us that 'A memoir is not the proper place for critical discussion and appraisal'. When one compares Prof. Sengupta's memoir with Herbert Read's 'T. S. E.—A Memoir' or George Steiner's tribute to F. R. Leavis (in *Language & Science*), one feels rather ashamed of the immense difference between the academic standard of an underdeveloped country like India and that of a developed one.

Surely the best way of honouring the memory of Prof T. N. Sen, who wrote 'Honouring and dishonouring the memory of Tagore' and admired Mr Ervine, the biographer of Shaw, for not adopting an attitude of a 'hero-worshipper' and for 'freely criticizing both the man and the writer where, he thinks, criticism is called for', is to see the man in proper perspective—and to be aware of his achievements as well as his limitations. The first thing to be said about his essays is that they are less impressive than his class-lectures. Indeed, as the

last great representative of the great tradition of 'Srutī', he was more of a teacher than a writer. His critical method like that of his contemporaries, is clearly eclectic, although Prof Sengupta would have us believe that 'two ideas lay at the back of his critical approach: autonomy of the world of imagination and the reconciliation of opposites in a work of art'. T. N. Sen's approach is biographical in 'Charles Lamb' ('in his attitude to life, such a life as his, lies the whole secret of Lamb's humour'), highly philosophical in 'Keats's Idea of Beauty' ('the intuitive apprehension, as opposed to rational knowledge, of reality), and quite Shavian in his defence of Shaw ('Shaw, like his great compeer H. G. Wells, has outgrown pure art'. With the exception of his famous study of the Nunnery Scene in Hamlet, his early essays, like 'Charles Lamb' and

'Keats's Idea of Beauty' are very much like restatements of received wisdom. But in the later essays such as 'Shakespeare's Short Lines' and 'Western Influences on the Poetry of Tagore' one is struck by a critical mind of an astonishing breadth and brilliance. In 'Shakespeare's Short Lines' as in his masterly study of the Nunnery Scene, T. N. Sen challenges the views of some English scholars and offers his own interpretation in a way that evinces his profound passion for close textual analysis. His essay on Tagore is a good retort to those Bengali intellectuals who are very much in the habit of making up 'for the lack of native genius or talent by a sedulous imitation of foreign models (all too common a feature of modern Indian literature)' and looking upon Tagore as one of their tribe, a bundle of Western influences. His short note on

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THE AGONY OF WEST BENGAL

By Ranajit Roy Rs. 10/- & Rs. 19.50

"If Mr Roy is to be believed, West Bengal has been treated by the Government of India much the same way as Karachi and Islamabad once treated East Pakistan... The book is loaded with official statements and statistics and until these are authoritatively repudiated the author's charge will stand! Mrs Gandhi's Government owes itself to answer the charge; or the verdict will be 'Guilty'." *The Sunday Statesman*, 15th October, 1972.

CASH AND VIOLENCE IN LAOS

By Anna Louise Strong Rs. 5/-

History of that old story—how with the power of cash Washington moved into Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam with "military aid" to the new governments to break their pledges of neutrality and bent them into a military base against China and North Vietnam.

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'Bharatnatyam' testifies to the wide range of his cultural interest, while his 'A Note on the translation of Poetry' reveals his acute sense of language and his insight into the creative process. And his lecture-notes, given in the Appendix, will be an invaluable aid to the post-graduate students of literary criticism.

It is a pity that T. N. Sen, a disciple of Vidyasagar according to the editor, chose to shut himself up in the elitist world of Presidency College. Most of his essays were published in his college magazine, a fact that speaks as much for his love of Presidency College as for his alienation from the larger society. Was it impossible for him to make his scholarship more useful to our society? For example, he could have, like F. R. Leavis, brought out a journal and initiated, with the help of his students, a new movement in literary criticism. It is unfortunate that instead of playing a more progressive role in the academic circle, he preferred to remain a cloistered scholar, deified by the Establishment and worshipped by a small band of loyal followers who always 'stood in awe of him' and never cared much for Aristotle's principle; 'Dear is Plato but dearer still is truth'.

SUBHAS CHOUDHURY

Commerce Yearbook Of Public Sector: 1972.

Editor Vadilal Dagli.

Published by D. B. Mahatme on behalf of *Commerce* (1935) Ltd. Price Rs 40. Pages 512.

The Commerce Yearbook now in its third year of publication has come to be recognised as a valuable reference work on the functioning of the public sector in India. The public sector has been expanding in all directions at the same time, and the process which started in the 60s has only gained momentum in the past few years. It is a story needed to be told in all its details, and the *Commerce* publication seeks to do precisely that. There have been some efforts by official agencies in this

direction but this private sector venture seems to have scored even in telling the story of the public sector!

The book begins with a perceptive narration of the origin and evolution of the public sector spread over a few chapters. It then goes on to present a morphological study of its composition and of the working of various categories of industries. Unlike other publications of this type, the yearbook also covers the public sector undertakings run by State governments. It thus becomes truly a window on the country's public sector, with which willy-nilly the fate of our economy has now been tied.

J. S

Producing Brecht

BY A DRAMA CRITIC

IN one sense, Brecht is a poet and playwright of the teeming, festering fascinating underworld of the modern cities. The crooks, beggars, prostitutes and their sharks who inhabit this world are but a part and prototype of the more respectable people we know or probably are. These characters he sees not only as flotsams and jetsams drifting in the backwash of industrial progress, but as actual heroes and heroines of this progress viewed as a lewd comedy. Their milieu becomes the very emblem of the system to which we all owe our existence. Brecht's concern has been to find a mock-image of the society he lived in. In the underworld he both loved and hated he found the image. It had a semblance with the world above, which could be used to parody the deeper realities of the society at large. To show capitalism as a trade prostitution, begging and moral quackery is to debunk and deflate it. Brecht's underworld is thus a caricature of the upper world of respectable trade, industry, culture and morality. All the low characters in his plays are fascimiles of their superior and more honourable confrères. All the lat-

ter's high-sounding interests and ideals, when reduced to their essentials, seem no more than transactions in a shady deal. This is part of Brecht's well-known technique of deflation and deglamourization, such as using mock-heroic verse, ironic paraphrase and parallels from classics parodying old themes and plots. etc. The ambivalence of his attitude towards the reality he portrays is due to the fact that he both revelled in and detested the vitality and vulgarity of the world around him. His picture brings out the cruelty, knavery, sensuality, crude struggle for existence and the coarse grasping nature of man in modern society. But he has a Shakespearean breadth and vigour to make his picture comprehensive, critical, sardonic, cruel, contemptuous, amused, fascinated and above all immensely vital and true.

Theatre Workshop's *Panchu-O-Mashi* adapted from an early one-act play by Brecht gives a brilliant representation of this essential Brechtian vision in miniature. Unlike Nandikar's *Tin Paishar Pala*, which enacts this same scene on a wider canvas, Mr Bibhas Chakraborty's direction does justice to all the complex stands and fine nuances in Brecht's picture of the underworld. The tangled roots and interdependence of exploitation in society are fully revealed in this comedy of an underworld deal. The director never allows the satirical points to be dulled by mere fun and frolic, nor does he suppress the vitality of the underworld scene in his concern for moral commitment. He preserves the right blend as we find in Brecht. All the vigour and vulgarity of life in the nether world, which is our own life stripped of pretences, appear through film songs, garish publicity decor and lighting, appropriate sets and above all superb acting. One must admire the boldness with which vulgar slangs are allowed in dialogues—in all their poetry and brutality so characteristic of Brecht himself. But not

for once are the ironic overtones of everything said and done are slurred in the least. The asides of Panchu and his portrayal by Manik Ray Chaudhuri are carried on wholly in this spirit. This role has a certain complexity, range, and also a degree of subtlety perhaps. Manik Ray Chaudhuri's performance, with wonderful mobility in gestures and facial expressions as well as a suitable voice for comic modulations is perfectly adapted to the needs of his role. Maya Ghosh not only plays a type role perfectly with vivid gestures, carriage and glances, but she brings out the individuality of her character like a true comedienne: Almost all the roles are well performed and it is something for the group to have got together such a wide range of acting talents—all in the comic-satirical vein. Theatre Workshop's virtuosity in group acting and duet acting, with gestures and deliveries giving the impression of a comic opera-cum-ballet and puppet show, deserves unstinted praise. The use of darkened stage with microphone blaring film music and electric bulbs alternately going on and off, to mark pauses between interludes, heightens the comic effects. The production matches Brecht's complex and unique profundity.

Najir Bichar

Najir Bichar (In Search of Justice), a comparatively slight piece, is based on a part serious and part comic dilemma faced by a judge in Nazi Germany when called upon to try three members of Hitler's storm troopers who broke into a Jew's jewel shop, wounded him and made off with several thousand marks' worth of ornaments. The judge has

a purely practical problem of having his hide and his reputation with the Nazis. Not that he feels any qualms of conscience in turning out a false verdict in favour of the three storm troopers, nor are the "facts" of the case altogether unamenable to such verdict. The trouble is, there are other pro-Nazi individuals, such as the Jew's Christian partner and his landlord, who would or would not denounce him to the Nazis according as it serves their several interests or prejudices and then there is the pretence of justice to keep up. Evidently the judge's predicament is a false one and yet how real it is, given his initial choice of evil. Brecht deflates him and reduces him to a comic shadow of a judge or even of a man. The portrayal of this role by Ram Mukhopadhyaya is sustained well from beginning to end. The slow transition from a comic puppet to some assertion of human dignity when the judge gives way to anguish is put across with sensitive rendering. At this point the judge becomes a kind of mock-hero, facing terror of isolation born of his own shabby compromise. He begins to fear professional rivalry from the Prosecutor who may like to see him incurring the ill-will of the Nazis. He looks up to the blazing sign of swastika and stands bowing before it to quench his misgivings, until in the end the sign is removed revealing behind it the darkened court room into which the judge disappears in the midst of deafening shouts of Heil Hitler!

The play is very well directed, with simple and adequate sets and sound effects. Ashoke Mukhopadhyaya as Prosecutor with the glib plausibility of his manner possibly hiding a crooked intent, offers a perfect contrast to the terrified puppet that the judge is. The latter's confusion has its comic effect heightened by Ashoke Mukhopadhyaya's assured gait and movement. Pradip Sen as Inspector rightly interprets his role as part of an impersonal machine. The rest of the cast live up to the comic content and tone of the play.

Imitation Bombay

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

SO Dinen Gupta has finally found a way out of the present crisis in Bengali cinema by casting his latest film *Basanta Bilap* in a Bombay mould. The story, completely tailor-made to satisfy the demands of the box-office is full of contrivances, coincidences and gross horseplay. There are four girls in a women's hostel who are pitted against four young men of the neighbouring locality and there is a constant battle of wits between the two groups. The *casus belli* however remains unclear and the film becomes an adolescent game with all the grown-ups behaving like teenagers. Cupid, of course, is up to his old tricks, throwing his webs around the warring groups and three pairs become easy victims of its spell. But the principal combatants are not to be swayed so easily. For them to come together, we have to wait till the climactic scene on the railway platform, when both of them seem to realise the full import of Virgil's dictum, "Love overcomes all things, let us too yield to love."

The influence of Bombay is writ large on every frame of the film. The dialogues are punctuated with double entendre and a sense of humour best suited for a rowdy tavern. The comic incidents are thrown about haphazardly without a minimum sense of pace and timing. The lyrics are just some lewd sprinklings of pennyerotica (here is a specimen, "I am Miss Calcutta nineteen-seventy six. Do you like to know my statistics?"). The locale is supposed to be a mofussil town in West Bengal, but there is hardly any typical detail and the camera rarely goes out of the artificial confines of studio sets. But with all his efforts to outwit Bombay in the display of crudity, the director has not succeeded beyond inept aping. May be his pseudo-serious proclivities have prevented him from going the whole hog in thi Bombay way or may be his ma-

CORRECTION

Line 1, Para 2 of last week's main editorial should read—"That this grim political battle will be fought without the direct intervention" etc.

terials have failed him. Whatever the case may be for us, it is definitely painful to sit through the bloodless twists and shakes by the girls and the low imitation of Shammi Kapoor and Johnny Walker by the main actors.

Letters

Democratic Rights

The Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights at a meeting held on January 28 condemned the dismissal or holding out the threat of discharge of government Employees and teachers under real or fabricated charge of their belief in one Political ideology or the other and eviction of others from their places of work or habitation for the same reason, forcible capture of trade and student unions and other bodies of a representative character; assaulting or holding out the threat of assault on oppositional organs; bringing up criminal cases against thousands of poor peasants, sharecroppers and landless labourers at the instigation of jotedars and landlords. This meeting opposed the proposal put forward by the West Bengal government for promulgating ordinances banning strikes.

It drew attention to the frightening sanitary conditions and physical violence to which political prisoners in all the Indian Jails have been subjected. The way unarmed political prisoners have been killed on different pretexts in different jails like Berhampur, Midnapur, Alipore Central, Alipore Special, Hooghly, Hazaribag, Gaya etc., speaks of the situation within the jails. At the same time, the innumerable incidents of death and maiming caused by torture in police lock-ups also show that the administrative machinery is misusing its power not only in the most inhuman way but also in complete contravention of all legal provisions.

The various detention laws, once prevalent in British India and now reintroduced under old and new names (MISA, DIR etc.), under which thousands of political workers, supporters and common people have been

detained without trial for years should be immediately repealed and all these political prisoners unconditionally released.

The meeting demanded that the death sentences passed on Sri Nagbhusan Pattanayak (Orissa) and other political prisoners be immediately withdrawn and they be immediately released.

The APDR appealed to all sections of the people, including workers, peasants, intellectuals and students, whatever differences of opinion and party affiliation they may have, to devote themselves towards the building up of a united movement to win back the rights mentioned in the resolutions.

GENERAL SECRETARY
APDR,
Calcutta

Counter-Offensive

In your "Counter-offensive" (13-1-73) you wrote "Sheikh Mujib was expected to veer towards the USA in due course. His friend, Mrs Gandhi, is also doing that." But may I ask what else China has been doing since the historic air-dash of Henry Kissinger to Peking? Do you really mean that India's stand vis-a-vis the USA is a sinister imperialistic game, while that of China is stuffed with revolutionary implications—implications that have emboldened the Pentagon to set Vietnam ablaze and enjoy the bonfire?

A READER
Berhampore, West Bengal

Whose English ?

After reading "English, whose English?" (13-1-73), I wonder why this article has been published in *Frontier*. The author fails to discuss whether or not English should be retained as the medium of instruction, examination and further as the language of administration. His main concern seems to be the use of unchaste and wrong English by even the so-called academicians in the universities. To my mind, advising people to use correct English does not fall within the

purview of this journal. The author reminds me of a Brahmin scholar at the time of King Bhoja. While going for some work, he came face to face with the king who was taking a morning walk. The Brahmin was shivering with cold. The king asked, "Kim sitam badhati Brahmana? (Is the cold causing you pain, Brahmana?)" The Brahmin, oblivious of his poverty because of the opiate of being high-born, learned and respected, immediately retorted, "Sitam na badhate rajan, yatha badhati badhate", "the cold is not causing me that much pain, o King, as the wrong use of badhati". At a time when *Frontier* is trying to focus the attention of the readers on the miseries of the people, the author wants us to bother about the niceties of English usage. Will you, comrade editor, please guard yourself against this danger?

SANGH SEN SINGH
Delhi

The Play's Not The Thing

It is a pity that 1799, an anti-imperialist play produced by the Minerva Theatre Workers, should meet with such a poor response from the progressive Calcuttans who are said to patronize left-wing drama. I was shocked to see that on Republic Day, this play dealing with the anti-British struggle of the Chuars, a tribal people, was greeted by an almost empty auditorium—a sad comment on our sense of nationalism and much-vaunted social consciousness. The director told me that the poor workers of the Minerva Theatre would not be able to continue the show any longer. Are not we, I should like to ask but socially conscious theatre-goers, by our indifference, compelling these theatre workers to give up their honest and admirable attempt to produce good drama? Do we have a moral right to condemn them if they are driven by frustration to choose the path of cultural prostitution like *Barbadhu*?

DIPENDU CHAKRABARTI
Calcutta

Barricade

The reviewer of Utpal Dutt's *Barricade* (January 6), whether deliberately or not, distorts the real significance of the play. Utpal Dutt, so far as I can say on the basis of my own perception, has no intention of backing up the "neglected cause" of a political party in a spirit of personal atonement. Rather, he may be said to be an eye-opener to his old political comrades who are still adhering to the politics of election. I ask the critic to remember the remarks of a character in the play, "What purpose will the election serve?" The exact words I cannot recollect, but the sense is the same. After so many scenes showing the injustice, terrorism and butchery practised by the Nazis the appeal for armed resistance against the inhuman regime has greater impact on the spectators. The dream, if there is any, of a revolution coming through the parliamentary way is shattered at the end.

The drama critic comments that at the end Utpal Dutt makes his barricade a sort of popular or united front whose ranks are swelled by penitent intellectuals like him. This is also misleading. Barricade here obviously means not a sort of united front, as used in the sense of the term, but the armed groups of communists resisting and repulsing the attack of the Nazis. The play, though unnecessarily lengthened towards the end, ends in a promise. Proper insight, not a jaundiced view, will help one to realise what *Barricade* has to say.

But the most tragic and at the same time funny thing is that such a play of mass appeal was shown at the Kalamandir. Have the Tatas and Birlas begun to invest in revolution?

LOHIT NAG
Calcutta

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FEBRUARY 10, 1973

Arbitrary Marking

The large percentage of failure at last Year's B.A. and B.Sc. Part I examinations of Calcutta University has been explained by the authorities as a consequence of the infringement of examination norms. The shame of the affair is that the University authorities sent a secret circular to all the examiners empowering them to award whatever mark they liked to any type of answer to any question, even zero. As a result of this senseless and draconian measure even innocent and deserving students have been penalized for no fault of their own. The entire system of examination has become farcical and the rot cannot be cured by simply penalising the students for examination offences.

S. K. HAZRA
Calcutta

Sex And Society

Whoever uses the value-loaded word "fornication" when only meaning sexual intercourse, possibly outside marriage, betrays a certain sickness of mind where sex is concerned. To talk of the "right to incest or adultery" as a "sexual privilege of the idle rich" reveals ignorance of the fact that incest and adultery is not less prevalent among the poor than among the rich, idle or otherwise; and expresses a total insensitivity to the fact that in a semi-feudal society where men and women have precious little freedom of choice of their sex partners, what in Biblical terminology would be called "incest" and "adultery" might often be the only love that one might be permitted. The use of the term adultery itself is reactionary, considering it is based on the bourgeois-feudal idea of the sanctity of marriage, a hypocritical concept that was vehemently attacked by Marx and Engels, for whom sexual freedom was not a privilege of the rich but one of the cardinal

freedom for which the communist movement fought.

It is indeed shocking that your drama critic should dismiss a Maharashtra play that has been widely acclaimed in other parts of India with no criticism whatsoever but a whole lot of sexual epithets like "woman's flesh", "fornication" etc.

ASHOK RUDRA
Santiniketan

An Apology

Navneet from Chandigarh has objected (30-12-72) to a sarcastic remark in my article "The Joint Sector". I am no Arya Samajist and hold no brief for any religion, sect or caste, including their political and military leaders and also such stalwarts among them as Rana Pratap, Shivaji and Guru Govind Singh of the Moghul period, whose true role, as taught to us in our seminar classes by a Professor, a D.Sc. from London University, was not to be stated in our answer-books lest we got zero.

The true history of India, depicting the reasons for the loss of our country's freedom to British imperialists, is bound to expose and dislodge many entrenched heroes of old and offend many brave communities and castes like Marathas and Rajputs.

Subject to and in the context of the above I tender apologies to Navneet.

D. D. SINGH
Pabarganj, New Delhi

সঙ্ক্ষিপ্ত

১৫শ সংখ্যা প্রকাশিত হয়েছে

এই সংখ্যায় থাকছে

* মন্তব্য * জাতীয় পটভূমি * ভারতের
নিজস্ব সমস্যা ও ঐতিহ্যের ক্ষেত্রে * ভবিষ্যৎ
শেষ পর্যন্ত কমিউনিস্টদেরই হাতে * আন্ত-
র্জাতিক * অতএব আর-এস পি বিধানসভায়
যোগ দিলেম * পাঠকের কলম

Drought

On January 22 while the office-goers were returning home the Democratic Youth Federation, an organisation controlled by the CPM, was shouting 'Democratic Youth Federation Kare Pukar—Inquilab Zindabad' at the Churchgate Station, Bombay. I was attracted by the enthusiasm shown by the youths and noticed that the 'Inquilab' was in connection with collecting funds for the drought-stricken Maharashtra people.

How can one believe that the patchwork monetary help to the Maharashtra peasants will ultimately relieve them of the misery they are facing even after 25 years of independence? Has the CMP told these cadres who is responsible for the drought in the villages in Maharashtra, that it is the landlord-led, capitalist, comprador bureaucratic government of the ruling Congress which is responsible for the present conditions all over India, since all their planning and actions are after all in the interests of their masters, and that it is not the shortage of rainfall that is responsible for the drought and the oppressed conditions in the country?

SUDHIR OAK
Bombay

Double Standard

It is not the first time that the double standard of the Indian press has caused us pain and shame. It is safe by far to shed crocodile tears over the torture meted out to writers abroad and cry oneself hoarse about from your "highly aware" readership, freedom and democracy being trampled upon in a far-off country. But nearer home and in our own country it is usual to see the Indian press adopt an obscene silence over events involving freedom of expression. That the Manipur Government broadcast the news of Prof I. K. Shukla's arrest over AIR Imphal, but did not transmit it to Delhi AIR, is of a piece with its manipulation of the UNI and the PTI in Imphal, who joined, the State

Government's conspiracy of blackout.

The despicable conduct of Hindi journals, which owed their Bangladesh special numbers to the dedicated labour of Prof Shukla, in betraying him and keeping silent over the affair, stigmatises them as agents of reaction and regress.

Police barbarism has permanently damaged his spine. Unconditionally released on bail, he is not being allowed to leave the State for arranging transfer of his case to some other State, getting himself medically examined, and arranging financial help in view of the government's refusal to pay him subsistence allowance for the last many months.

COLLEAGUES AND WELL-WISHERS
Imphal, Manipur

The Periar

Modern jurisprudence would shudder at the suggestion of transferable guilt. But, for Mr Singh, it is understandable that today's Brahmins should be accountable for the doings of their previous generations (January 27). "The Periyar" is nothing more than a cheap rabble-rouser. As I do not believe that every person and phenomenon can be constrained within the colours of the class struggle spectrum, I shall pass the temptation of characterising this fraud of "the Periyar" as comprador petit-bourgeois despite a well arguable case for that.

One hears that even in the hectic days of the Chinese Revolution, there were trials of landlords. The bad ones were punished with varying degrees of severity. The good ones were presumably let go. In the GPCR, the Red Guards were given explicit instructions to debate rather than fight. I for one choose to attribute all this to the strong ethical sense of the great son of a great civilisation leading the movement, rather than "tactics" or revolutionary opportunism. (The last term—a highly interesting one, I picked up from one of your current numbers). We have had much ideological

polemics in the country. An enquiry into ethical aspects, requisites, norms etc is perhaps overdue. A system in which the dignity (or fallibility, to view it cynically) of the individual is not respected is essentially weak.

Pre-empting enthusiastic discoveries from your "highly aware" readership, I shall myself frankly state that I am a Brahmin by birth, and behaviourally petit-bourgeois with no revolutionary claims.

T. R. RAMALINGAM
Calcutta

We have stopped supplying *Frontier* to the following agents for non-payment of bills despite many reminders. The inconvenience to the readers is regretted.

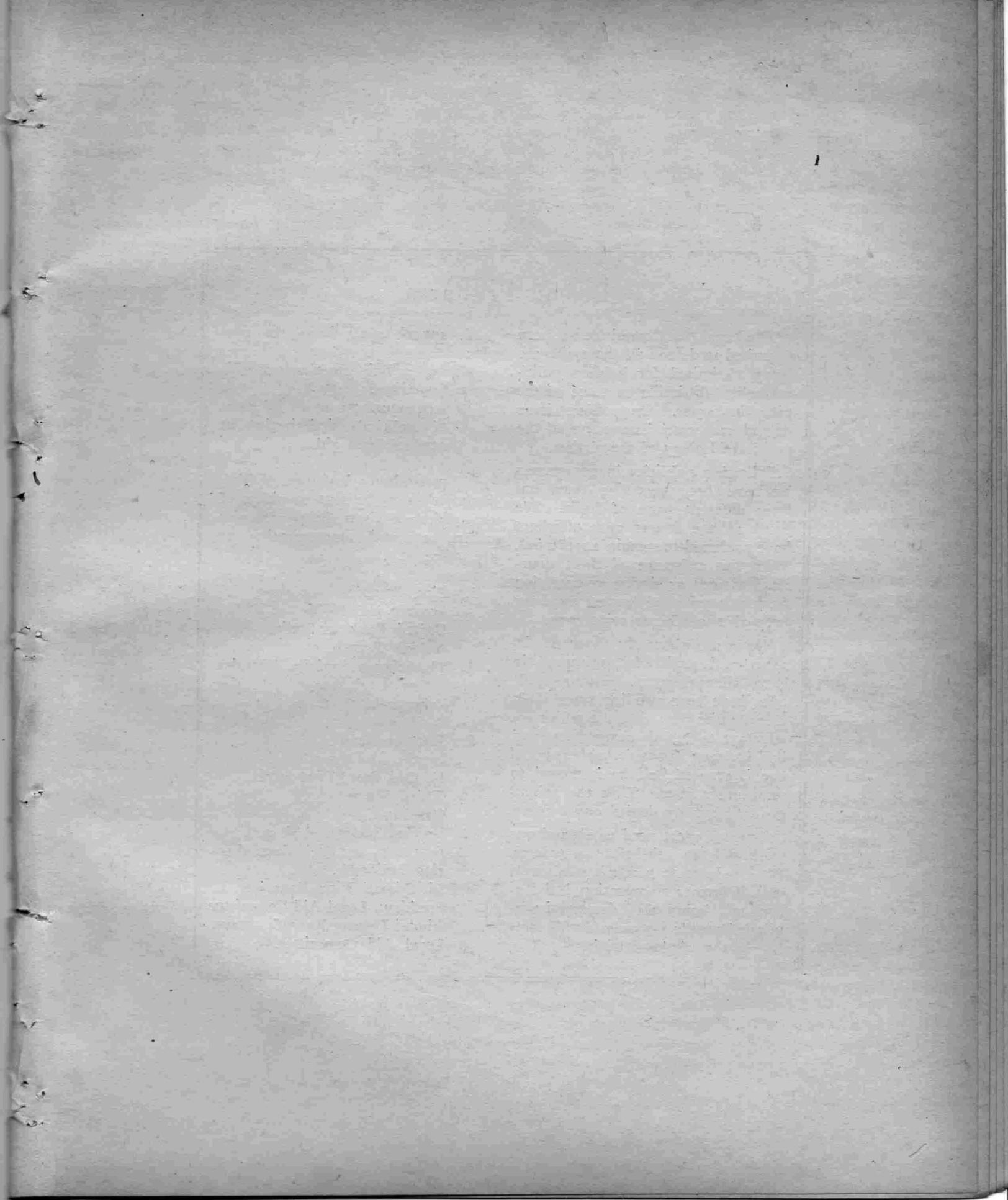
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FEBRUARY 10, 1973



Defend Prisoners

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

Following publicity in newspapers we have been receiving donations from different parts of India. We thank all the donors, most of whom have preferred to remain anonymous. With the assistance of these donations as well as sincere co-operation from a number of lawyers we have been able to take up some cases.

There are about six thousand detenus and undertrial prisoners in West Bengal only. Innumerable cases have been pending since 1968-69. Despite reminders the police are reluctant to submit chargesheets and bail is being opposed stubbornly. If one is granted bail he is tagged to some other cases. Thus the prisoners are virtually denied any defence.

There is great need to expand our work and the task before us is huge. We can hope to tackle it adequately only if greater co-operation is forthcoming from all democratically-minded people not only in this State but in the whole of India.

We appeal to all democratic people :

To contribute generously to this Committee ;

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

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

1. Bina Banerjee
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Sd. Srimati Bina Banerjee,
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Srimati Jayasree Rana, Secretary,
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