

# frontier

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## HYPOCRISY ABOUNDING

THE CPI's sudden tear-shedding for the Naxalites in Gopiballavpur is a stunt which will take in nobody. The party knows well what the CPI (ML) thinks of it; yet it persists in a show of fraternisation to embarrass the CPI (M). If it was sincere in its advocacy of generosity to political rivals, it would have shown some accommodation to the CPI (M), a party with which its relationship bears resemblance to that between the CPI (M) and the CPI (ML). That would have resolved to an extent the problem of the United Front in West Bengal and perhaps averted the collapse of the UF Government in Kerala. Nor is the party practising in Kerala what it is preaching in West Bengal; to create a make-believe it has given the Home portfolio to another party so that its dirty jobs may be done by proxy, but as leader of the mini-front it cannot claim to be innocent of the police action in Kerala against the demonstrating people. The CPI is searching for a cat's paw to fight the CPI (M). It is no secret that it is behind the current tantrums of Mr Ajoy Mukherjee; the voice may be of the Bangla Congress but the words are of the CPI. Its hypocritical concern at the deployment of the Eastern Frontier Rifles in Gopiballavpur, the police excesses in the area, and the denial of political status to the arrested Naxalites is part of the anti-CPI (M) campaign in which the CPI and some of its collaborators delight. All these allegations are being welded into a sturdy stick to beat the CPI (M) with.

This is not to justify the nature of the police operation in Gopiballavpur or to defend Mr Jyoti Basu's curt refusal to withdraw the EFR units from the area. But in this matter no UF party can point an accusing finger at another and adopt a holier-than-thou attitude. The so-called dissent in the Cabinet or the UF committee is for public consumption only. The detractors of Mr Basu would not have forced a different policy on him had he brought up the matter in the Cabinet. Now that he has refused to budge would they walk out of the Cabinet rather than be a party to the repressive policy? After all, few charges can be graver against a government claiming to be left than treating politicals as ordinary criminals and letting loose the police on innocent citizens. The friends of the UF need not worry, no party is going to do that. At most, there may be another "resistance movement" of a sort against police

excesses to supplement the Chief Minister's satyagraha against police inaction. And the two, in spite of their proclaimed disparity of aims, may not find cooperation difficult. None of the present dissenters had objected to the police action in Naxalbari two years ago; the conscience of the CPI was not roused when women and children were mowed down by some vengeful policemen. In what circumstances the decision for police action was taken will never be known, but there are reports that while advising the police to use the minimum force, the Government was prepared for a death-roll of about 250. The CPI had acquiesced perhaps because Mr Ajoy Mukherjee's stewardship of the Home department had converted the operation into a mission of mercy. Much is made of the instruction to use minimum force. This is a deliberate bluff; an order to use minimum force implies permission to "shoot to kill", for in police logic a fatal shot in time saves nine. In spite of the UF Government's this killer logic still rules.

Clean police action, like a clean Bomb, is unattainable. Muskets do not become less lethal if they are wielded by a force other than the EFR. The talk of a political solution of the problem posed by the CPI (ML) simultaneously with police action is a sham; the two cannot go together. There is only a semantic difference between the policies of the UF and the non-left governments in this matter. No protesting voice has so far been raised against the conference of senior police officers of Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal to coordinate their actions against the Naxalites; the conference was held in the Red city of Calcutta itself and nobody thought it strange that officers of the CPI (M)-led coalition in West Bengal, Swatantra-led coalition in Orissa, and the Centrally-run Government of Bihar should collaborate in tackling a political antagonist. The Naxalites may well argue that the difference between these parties is one of labels and not of contents. Nor has any of the UF parties protested so far against the invocation of section 107

of the Cr.P.C. to bound a person suspected to be capable of aiding the Naxalites in future; transgression of the bond is punishable with imprisonment. The provision is meant for hardened criminals, and the UF Government seems to have set a precedent by permitting it to be used against ordinary citizens. These are instances of the changing character of the UF Government, of the growing hiatus between its policy and practice. By overlooking these gross deviations Mr Basu's critics are merely exposing their zest for gimmicks. They are as much to blame for what is happening in Gopiballavpur as Mr Jyoti Basu is; they cannot consent to the policy and dissent from the implementation.

## Verdict Against Ministers

The State Governors assembled in New Delhi must have been mightily pleased to see, on the eve of their conference, the official summary of the conclusions reached by Mr J. R. Mudholkar. He was asked to enquire into charges against all the Ministers of the first UF Government in Bihar. Mr Mudholkar however could not content himself by confining his wisdom just within Bihar. He has advised Indians to get their Constitution changed immediately if they want to save their democracy. What sort of change? Mr Mudholkar suggested that every case of withdrawal of a criminal case involving offences against persons or property, communal relations and security of the State should be referred to the President or the Governor, who need not be hampered by the advice of the Council of Ministers.

Mr Mudholkar has no faith in Ministers, particularly those who have a habit of defecting. He wants the Representation of People's Act amended so that a Minister, who bring about the defeat of a government of which he was a member, cannot secure office for himself in the succeeding government. This recommendation no doubt owes to Mr

Mudholkar's indignation at the crass examples of defection during the past three years all over India. But can this be accepted in principle without undermining the fundamental rights? Mr Mudholkar is of course all for democracy as it obtains today in India.

Mr Mudholkar went into all the 65 independent charges that the Shoshit Dal Government preferred against the UF Ministers. He has dismissed 38 charges and except in one case did not find any instance of personal corruption. He indicts all the Ministers except one because they did not abide by the advice of civil servants.

There could have been nothing wrong if Mr Mudholkar had analysed the concrete cases of abuse of political power, each on its own merit or demerit. But the way he has jumped to general conclusions ("If the Government undermines the morale of officials, the executive arm will itself be weakened.") should make one doubt the utility of appointing such Commissions. Nobody wanted Mr Mudholkar to write a chapter on political science; he was asked simply to investigate the charges. His over-enthusiasm has however revealed his bias towards the executive, although he considers himself solely concerned with democracy.

On the whole, Mr Mudholkar has certified that the first UF Ministers in Bihar were by and large competent and honest. How he determined that by scrutinising 65 stray charges is of course not known to laymen. Mr Mudholkar, it seems, has made a comparative study in corruption in various States, basing himself just on the charges. The charges against those in the former Congress Ministry in Bihar, in Jammu and Kashmir and Orissa were much more heinous. Therefore Mr Mudholkar concludes that the Bihar UF Ministers were not bad characters.

No wonder that the accused Ministers feel greatly relieved, except Mr K. N. Singh, who however need not feel overwhelmed by just one more indictment. The picture in Bihar was not a dismal one, concluded Mr

Mudholkar. The CPI has welcomed the Commission findings with great joy. Its member, Mr Tej Narayan Jha, has been acquitted creditably. It does not matter to the CPI that its two other members, who were in the Cabinet, had been found guilty of bad orders and actions, even by such a generous Commission.

## Allianza Para Progreso

The Spanish for President Kennedy's pompous PR phrase for the Latin Americans, Alliance for Progress, also means Alliance Stops Progress. This many Latin Americans themselves are quick to point out. The Alliance has not joined them together in a sense of mutual advance; it has merely accentuated US economic exploitation and bolstered up puppet regimes which have added to tensions within Latin America. It is, for example, no secret that the 1964 Army coup in Brazil was engineered largely by the State Department because General Castelo Branco was believed to be more anti-communist and more pro-American than the former President, Mr Joao Goulart. It is also on public record that the USA provided twice as much to Brazil under military rule as it did under an elected Brazilian government. Yet the staunchest Brazilian supporters of the US policy would hesitate to claim that Brazil's economic condition has improved. The only change has been political: from a democratic regime of a sort to a ruthless military dictatorship. Some idea of the oppressive nature of the system could be formed from some of the popular reactions; in the five years after the 1964 coup the country saw widespread student demonstrations and riots and many outbreaks of urban violence. The murder of an American Army officer in Sao Paulo in October 1968 and the kidnapping of the US Ambassador in September this year were reminders that not many people had reconciled themselves to living under Yanqui imperialism.

Perhaps inevitably, this has made the military regime unleash harsher repression, as could be seen from the killing in Sao Paulo on November 4 of the Brazilian revolutionary leader, Carlos Marighela. The official version at the time of killing was that he had been betrayed by two priests who drove him into a police ambush. New information gathered from reliable underground sources (published in *The Times*, London) shows not only that this version was false but also that the military authorities resorted to particularly brutal torture of civilians, and priests to boot, in order to extract information about the man they wanted. It is now learnt that a Roman Catholic group was giving shelter and help to the revolutionaries and two Dominican priests of this group were arrested in Rio de Janeiro on November 1 and severely tortured throughout the night in a room of the Navy Ministry. Unable to bear the savage and prolonged torture, the two priests finally gave the police the password and telephone number used by Mr Marighela to arrange meetings. The phone number belonged to a bookshop; and, since the arrest of the two priests was not known either to their fellow priests or to Mr Marighela, the police came to know about another meeting between the revolutionary leader and two other priests by tapping the bookshop telephone. As Mr Marighela approached the meeting place alone, unsuspecting and on foot, some 20 policemen waiting under cover shot him down in the street, and the two waiting priests were promptly arrested.

So much for the civilized niceties under Brazil's progressive alliance with the USA. But things are hardly more encouraging in Bolivia even under the new regime of General Alfredo Ovando who, after taking power in a bloodless coup last September, indicated that he would follow a policy of "leftist nationalism". The new President has rejected several appeals from different parts of the world for the release of Regis Debray and his friend, Ciró Bustos.

But, perhaps because of General Ovando's professions, not all people have altogether given up hope, and a new appeal has now been sent by some of the world's most distinguished and respected men, apart from many lesser people. The signatories to the appeal include Bertrand Russell, Pablo Picasso, Charles Chaplin, Stravinsky, Henry Moore, Sir Julian Huxley, Lord Kenneth Clark, Sir John Gielgud, Graham Greene, Alberto Moravia, Arnold Wesker, Norman Mailer, Rene Clair, Fellini, Pasolini, Resnais, Visconti, J. E. Salk and Daniele Bovet (Nobel Prize winning biologists), Alfred Kastler (Nobel laureate in physics), Samuel Beckett (who won the Nobel Prize this year), Aime Cesaire, Ignazio Silone, Dame Peggy Ashcroft, Julie Christie, etc., etc. Certainly not an unmistakable bunch of communists. But who knows what the State Department thinks. President Ovando has one clear occasion to prove that he thinks differently.

## Election, Suharto Style

The other day a visiting Walt Rostow announced in Djakarta that Indonesia has reached the celebrated 'take-off' stage. That this stage is not purely economic was confirmed last month by President General Suharto—Indonesia, notwithstanding what her detractors said about military dictatorship, is set for a democratic take-off in 1971. True the General President has been dragging his feet over the question of a general election but that has nothing to do with any anti-democratic design as such. It is in fact to assure the Indonesians the blessings of democracy that he has occupied the Presidential chair on a semi-permanent basis. What has so long caused his misgivings about general elections is the cost involved in the process which otherwise could be turned for the economic development of Indonesia. The concern for the economic well-being of the country has also led him to restrict

the scope of the general elections. One third of the members of the new Parliament will be supplied by the Army, thus cutting down a third of the election expenditure. Besides, as the watchdog of democracy General Suharto cannot allow the communists to subvert the democratic process. Members of the PKI have been liquidated to make democracy safe but their sympathisers are lurking in the shadows. So they have been disenfranchised and if that means disenfranchising half of the population it cannot be helped. President Suharto will also personally take the trouble of screening the candidates to make things foolproof.

In fact, enough has already been done to warn the enemies of democracy. Recently nine young men who opposed the election of the mayor of Medan, a democrat personally approved by General Suharto, were imprisoned. They had the cheek to try to influence the electorate against the official candidate.

General Suharto has also taken care to put the armed forces firmly under his grip before giving a trial to democracy. Indonesia has been divided into six defence zones and the posts of commander-in-chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force have been replaced by those of the chief of staff. They can no longer order the movement of forces, "not even one unit." All deployment of forces would be carried out under the direction of the Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces—a dual post held fortunately by President Suharto. These measures were taken to prevent the use of the armed services for "unhealthy political purposes". President Suharto cannot overlook the fact that every now and then communist sympathisers are flushed out of the ranks of the army.

All these precautions are not enough. Who knows the mischief the communists might unleash between now and 1971? Reports of guerilla action are already streaming in from Central Java, Sarawak and Sumatra. Besides, one must take

into account General Suharto's warning that elections should not be allowed to disturb the smooth development of the Five Year Plan. And the election, after all, will cost \$44,600,000—so badly needed for the plan.

## Declining Exports

The bonanza which marked India's export trade during the period following the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967 seems to have spent itself. Export trends since the beginning of the current fiscal year have been most disappointing; sales for the major items are scarcely above what they were in the corresponding weeks and months in the previous year. There is now talk of getting together our ambassadors in the Far East, South Asia and Middle East to evolve a co-ordinated programme of 'aggressive exports'. The Fourth Plan document has made a fetish of exports moving up by 7 per cent a year; if the trend established in the early months continues, we might end up this year with no rise in exports at all, or even a fall.

It is not surprising that events have turned out so dismally. One cannot live by gimmickry alone. Export promotion presupposes rigid tightening of internal cost, improving the quality of processing and packing, efficiency in arranging distribution outlets and a general sobriety of approach combining cool-headedness with solid spade work. Most of these basic ingredients have been lacking from our export efforts. Given the sheltered market within the country, the traders have not felt the least bit interested in pushing sales abroad; whatever have been going out recently have been on account of the lure of special export incentives which were retained even following the devaluation of the rupee. But if internal costs keep sliding, even the special incentives were bound to be less than lucrative sooner or later. This has now come about. Despite the usual patter

about price stability, the general price index has shown an increase of at least 5 per cent since last year; to that extent, our goods have met with stiffening competition abroad. The State Trading Corporation, under its new Chairman, has been mostly specialising in cheap public relations stunts. But whatever increase in its activities has taken place has been on account of compulsory canalising of trade, and has not meant any *net* addition to the country's balance of payments position. In some of the new lines where the STC had ventured, for example, the export of human hair, the performance has been exceedingly poor.

It is time the basic issue was squarely faced. Till so long as strict surveillance is not exercised on the internal cost structure and prices are not kept on leash, India stands little chance of expanding her exports. If, in the rest of the world, prices are quiet, but in India inflation marches ahead, the clientele for our goods will continue to thin out. If the Government is unable to discipline internal prices for political reasons, the time has perhaps come to make a selective departure from the policy of blanket import control. The only way the industrialists here can be taught a lesson is by confronting them with the threat of competition from abroad. Here too, however, the political constraints might be altogether great.

That the authorities remain largely on the defensive is once more borne out by the snap decision to cut the export duty on jute carpet backing. This is one commodity in which we still retain a competitive advantage; it is thus scandalous that the Central Government had to succumb to the blackmailing of the jute interests and scale down the duty. The revenue loss to the Government will now have to be made up by other kinds of tax measures, possibly indirect levies on the mass of the population. In reality, therefore, the lowering of the export duty on carpet backing will imply a transfer of income from the poor strata of taxpayers to the privileged ones. As if this were not enough, the

Government of West Bengal is reported to be thinking of advancing money to the jute tycoons so that the latter could refloat the discredited Jute and Jute Goods Buffer Stock Association allegedly for the purpose of offering support to raw jute prices. A sucker is born every minute; the innocents in the West Bengal Cabinet perhaps do not realise that the money it advances will not help the poor farmers, but will merely be some free credit for the vultures who man the jute industry. But then, by now the truth has been fairly firmly established that the more left-sounding a Government, the more retrograde is its policies.

## Not Cricket

The cricket fever was a revelation. On Tuesday, the midday *Bengali* bulletin of AIR headlined the Eden Gardens stampede, but the story was given at the end. One had to mourn the death of the King of Bharatpur and bear with other items before coming to the death of six men. Parliament Street priorities are strange.

Also strange was the behaviour of passengers in a tram car in the afternoon. With long faces, in mournful voices, they discussed the Indian failure. But none of them had a word to utter about the morning's tragedy.

There were some people who thought that since Australia participates in the genocide in Vietnam the cricket team should be boycotted. Demonstrations were feared. A Marxist Minister, however, dismissed this point of view with the remark that politics should not interfere with sports. Coming after massive reports of the My Lai massacre and on the eve of the arrival of the PRG delegation from South Vietnam, the statement sounded strange. How stupid are those people in England who do not want the South African cricketers to play there!

## View from Delhi

# Mrs Gandhi's Rope Trick

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

THE left parties are being taken for a ride and they do not know if Mrs Indira Gandhi is being cynical or just clever. Her faction of the Congress in Kerala is on the point of joining the CPI-led minority Ministry but in Delhi, she has pulled off a veritable rope trick to humour the CPI(M). The efforts to get Mr Ajoy Mukherjee and the Bangla Congress wholesale into her party have been continuing in Calcutta and New Delhi. Mr B. T. Ranadive might snarl at the rest of the Politbureau and threaten resignation as a pressure tactic to pull his party out of the AITUC and the West Bengal United Front, but other leaders of the CPI(M) know their ropes. Mrs Gandhi knows hers.

The election of a member from the Lok Sabha to the Coir Board provided the occasion for the famous rope trick. Political parties have predilections for particular export commodities. The CPI's affluence, to be sure, is linked with the export of tobacco, cashewnuts and mica and rupee trade provides the medium. The CPI(M) is emotionally involved in coir and its export. Mrs Susheela Gopalan (wife of Mr A. K. Gopalan) was the party's candidate for the place on the Coir Board and the only rival was Mr Biswambharan, another Kerala member, belonging to the splinter "Indian Socialist Party" which is part of the rag-tag coalition Ministry in Kerala. When the CPI(M) found it was not getting the support of other Opposition groups, Mrs Gandhi came to its rescue. There was a whip issued to members of her Parliamentary Party to ensure Mrs Gopalan's election. Mrs Gandhi's socialist bona fides should now be beyond doubt to the CPI(M) leadership, whatever Mr Ranadive might have to say.

The pattern of alignments is now

more or less clear. The same constellation of political groups which rallied to salvage her at the Presidential election in August and ensured her victory in the Lok Sabha on November 17 over the Rabat issue backed her candidate, Mr G. G. Swell, for Deputy Speakership. Roughly the same pattern will be repeated in the Deputy Chairmanship election in the Rajya Sabha though the Marxists seem to have some reservations about Mr Khobargade at the moment. Dr Z. A. Ahmed's new theorisation on behalf of the CPI is amusing. Mrs Gandhi's party is the largest in the House and therefore his party will back her nominee! But it is now too well known in the lobbies that his party was trying to sponsor Mr Narayana Panda of Orissa and back out on his earlier commitment to support Mr Gaure Murahari of the SSP.

The Syndicate Congress has reason to be happy that it has demonstrated thrice over that Mrs Gandhi wants to be a Prime Minister at any cost and a group of political parties are determined to ensure her survival at any cost. As Dr Ram Subhag Singh said, it is now a *sarkari* Congress and a *sarkari* Opposition outside the real Opposition. But the tenuousness of it all is being realised by more and more leaders. Even Mrs Gandhi knows it and would find a mid-term poll inevitable. The Opposition was justified in apprehending plans for a snap election and seeing in a tricky amendment moved by the Government to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Reservation Bill a plan to get the Lok Sabha dissolved in a few weeks. The amendment sought to eliminate the hiatus that might arise if the State legislatures did not ratify the Bill before the present reservation of seats of Scheduled Castes and Tribes lapsed on January 25, 1970. Over half the State legislatures have

to ratify the Bill because it involves amendment of the Constitution. Unless these reservations are extended, elections on the basis of present reservation cannot be held for the Lok Sabha or State legislatures. Mr Panampilli Govinda Menon tried to hustle the amendment through but failed.

Unless Mrs Gandhi takes the initiative to get eight or nine of the States to give priority to this Bill and get it ratified by March, her plans for a snap election in April-May would fail. Once the monsoons begin, there is no chance of holding the poll until after September-October.

#### How Many Seats?

The arithmetical exercises on the electoral chances are on. The Home Ministry's exercise has arrived at interesting calculations. Mrs Gandhi's Congress can hope to win 125 seats in the Lok Sabha if the poll is held around April next. The Syndicate will get 94 seats. But Mrs Gandhi, with the support of the two communist parties, the DMK, the Bangla Congress, the Akalis, the RSP and other splinter groups and Independents can muster 275 members in the Lok Sabha and she can head a minority government if not a coalition ministry. She would still be the leader of the single largest party. This does not take into account the pre-electoral possibilities of adjustment. There is little the CPI could give by way of pre-electoral support unless it is assumed that the CPI would seek a direct alliance with Mrs Gandhi's Congress against the CPI(M). And it is again extremely improbable that she would seek an alliance with the CPI(M), forcing the CPI to confront her. The more likely course would be a pre-electoral adjustment with regional parties like the Bangla Congress, the BKD, the DKM and the Akalis and with forces like the Shiv Sena if need be and the attempt at a coalition or minority government with the sup-

port of the two communist parties and the DMK in addition to the other allies. The DMK will have very little to offer her by way of support at the pre-election stage.

Amidst her extra-mural manoeuvres, Mrs Gandhi seems to have forgotten the problems of her own party. Attendance at the Ahmedabad and Bombay plenary sessions will not decide anything. The real crisis in her party will begin after the Bombay session. The Ahmedabad session will queer the pitch for her by going beyond the 10-point programme but the effort on her part is to find a left-of-centre platform to give her party a radical image. The moment she begins implementing any of the major measures in the programme, the waverers and the political adventurers who pack her organisations would begin defecting to the Syndicate or gang up to form a powerful third force. In any case, she cannot keep much of the support that is demonstrated for her at the Bombay plenary session. The Syndicate has been recovering some lost ground in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab while Mrs Gandhi has failed to topple the ministries in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.

Everything points to the early exit of the present Government at the Centre. Mrs Gandhi might have survived the winter session of Parliament but appears most reluctant to face the budget session. Her options are not many now and the only alternative to dissolution of Parliament is glorious non-government based on non-ideology leading to a weird populist phase. It would be escapist politics. But the escapism seems to have begun with the left. Mr P. Sundarayya is known to have told an SSP leader that his party faced isolation (from whom?) and Mrs Gandhi was trying to isolate them. The only answer to the challenge he could think of was support to Mrs Gandhi in the name of forestalling a right take-over. Now we know the ideological significance of Mrs Susheela Gopalan's election to the Coir Board.

December 14, 1969

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# Peasants Of The Parganas—I

ASHIM MUKHOPADHYAY

THE present struggles of the peasantry in the Parganas can be understood well if the past is known. Like other parts of undivided Bengal this region also saw, from time to time, severe conflicts between the peasantry on the one side and the zamindars, mahajans (moneylenders) and their paid agents on the other. Knowledge of this background is essential for a correct assessment of the present happenings.

Before the advent of the British, the Mughals were the real masters of this land, and before them the Hindus and the Turko-Afghans. Even at that time the peasantry revolted against oppression. Sincere and serious students of history will never forget the "Kaibarta revolt" during the reign of King Rampal. They will not label Dibbak and Bhim, the leaders of that revolution, as mere rebels. On the contrary they will adore these two leaders as champions of the cause of the poor peasantry.<sup>1</sup>

In lower Bengal which comprised the Parganas, Howrah, Midnapore, Khulna, Dacca, Bakhargunge, several leaders arose from the lowest rung of the social ladder at different times to oppose the tyrants. The peasants and artisans formed the rank and file of their army, fought for them and helped them to seize power. In almost all cases a new monarchical set-up came into existence and the gains were short-lived, but in that extreme feudal structure of society nothing better could have been obtained. In the Parganas and Howrah there were many such local leaders of humble origin. They are now mere legendary figures.<sup>2</sup>

Even the folk gods were once such leaders. If the religious side of the history of their origin is rejected, the

things to consider are economic and political factors. Dakshin Roy, Panchanan, Panchu Banbibi, all these folk gods were once connected with the economic and political struggles of the common people. But as days went on, people began to worship them as gods. The upper classes, who used to exploit them, constantly encouraged this process, because they knew that by putting a religious coating on the real facts they would be able to hoodwink the next generations of their victims. Thus what was an economic struggle was turned into a religious feat. However, these folk gods and "Kaibarta" or "Bagdi" leaders were the first peasant agitators in Bengal. This is an untold story of our social history.

In the Turko-Afghan period there were many possibilities of peasant movements on a large scale in the Parganas and also in other parts of the province, but things happened otherwise. Stories of conversion of the Hindus have been always misunderstood by our pundits. Behind this countrywide conversion were the age-old economic grievances of the common people. Most of them were peasants. They were ready for revolt. But they were disorganized. The newcomers understood the situation very well. They planned not to organize those peasants against the existing feudal system which they themselves had decided to run. But they thought of setting them upon the Hindu feudal lords. To serve both these purposes they urged the ignorant and oppressed peasants to embrace Islam, by doing which they would be placed in 'behest' (heaven). But in reality this call for conversion was a sound strategy of the Muslims. In this way they isolated the militant Hindu peasants and artisans from their community; feeling helpless, isolated they submitted to their new masters and with every passing day began to lose their mili-

tancy. In Haroa-Balanda (northern part of 24-Parganas) and in Baruipur, Khari etc (the southern part) peasant revolts could have been staged in the early period of the Turko-Afghan rule. Pir Gorachand of Haroa, Mubarak Ghāzi of Ghutiar-i-Sharif, Bara Khān Ghāzi of Khari were nothing but local Muslim leaders who cleverly canalised the grievances of the local peasantry into campaigns against the ruling Hindu lords. But they never tried to organize the people for a struggle through which they could have improved their own lot. However, these pirs and ghāzis are now worshipped as folk gods.<sup>3</sup>

## Nothing To Choose

During the Mughal rule, the peasantry in the Province (including its lower portions) occasionally rose in rebellion against the local fauzdars and talukdars. Those rebellions were ruthlessly suppressed. Men of the upper stratum of society always deceived those brave but simple peasants and exploited them to serve their own interests. The 'Bara-Bhuians' of Bengal had many peasant soldiers in their army to fight Akbar and Jehangir. They ignited a spirit of nationalism in the minds of the ignorant peasants, made them communal and then set them upon the Mughals but they themselves were no less tyrants. Pratapaditya, one of the "Bara-Bhuians" who ruled over the present Jessore, Khulna and a large part of the Parganas, was a tireless oppressor of his subjects. After the battle of Plassey, Robert Clive wrote to the authorities of the East India Company that when the small Company-infantry was moving to the Nawab's palace at Murshidabad, several thousand natives gathered on the highway. They could easily crush Clive and his followers if they

<sup>3</sup> *Banglar Laukik Devata* by Gopendra Krishna Basu.

*Bengal District Gazetteers* (24-Parganas, Khulna, Jessore) by L.S. S. O'Malley.

*Pashim Banger Sanskriti* by Benoy Ghosh (In these books the religious side of the history of the Ghazis is described).

<sup>1</sup> Dacca History of Bengal, Vol. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Census Handbook—Howrah (1961) (see the history portion).

had wished, but they remained silent spectators.<sup>4</sup> Clive could not realize the reason for their remaining silent. Actually to the toiling masses of Bengal replacement of the "Nawab" by the "Sahib" was nothing but replacement of one oppressor by another. Neither did the Nawab approach them,—nor did they extend their help to him. From their past lessons they realized that they were the exploited. It was only when they organized themselves to struggle against their oppressors and exploiters that they succeeded in securing some concessions.

On December 20, 1757, Mir Jafar, the new Nawab of Bengal, surrendered to the Company the zamindari or landholder's rights over the Parganas.<sup>5</sup> Clive, who was then master of Bengal, had his eyes on this fertile tract. He had already written to the Court of Directors that "the annual income in this area I will venture to estimate at ten lacs per annum".<sup>6</sup> He got his chance when in June 1765 Mir Jafar conferred on him the "Jagir" or zamindari of the Parganas.<sup>7</sup> From that time began the real story of the Parganas, an ugly story of unlimited exploitation of its people by the English and their native agents.

The southern section of the district was in a wild and uncultivated state. It was an ideal habitat of ferocious animals, reptiles and pirates. The first attempt to reclaim it by granting leases to individuals was made between 1770 and 1773. The next attempt at reclamation was carried on by Mr Tilman Henckle, the judge and magistrate of Jessore. Between 1811 and 1823, this region of the Parganas, together with the lower part of Jessore and Bakargunge or the Sunderbans in short, was surveyed by several English officers.

<sup>4</sup> Clive's Letters to the Court of Directors.

<sup>5</sup> *Bengal District Gazetteer* (24-Parganas), by L. S. S. O'Malley. (See the history portion).

<sup>6</sup> See note no 4.

<sup>7</sup> Papers of the "Select Committee of the House of Commons on the affairs of the East India Company. Vol. I, pp cxi-cxii.

Their object was the same, i.e., reclamation and cultivation of the Sunderbans.<sup>8</sup> But that was hampered by flaws in the system of land distribution and the ill-defined character of the lands distributed on lease. These again encouraged the opportunist zamindars to start boundary disputes. The Company felt the need of a correct survey, and in 1830 for the first time the Sunderbans came to exist as a clearly defined area. Since then many rules have been passed at regular intervals up to the end of the 19th century (1853, 1863, 1879, 1897) to reclaim and cultivate this wild but fertile tract.<sup>9</sup> But the mission proved a grand failure. The entire region turned into hell.

The system of land distribution and collection of revenue in the northern part of the Parganas was completely different. To that part were extended the rules of the Permanent Settlement (1793). From that time onwards, the northern portion of the Parganas along with other districts was repeatedly subjected to revisions of the land and land revenue system, for instance the Act of 1799, the Act of 1812, the Act of 1845, the Act of 1859, the Act of 1885 etc. However none of these Acts could solve the basic problem. "Who is the real owner of the soil"?—remained an unsettled question. The zamindars and mahajans prospered at the expense of the ryots, the latter gradually became paupers.

#### "The Baboos"

Introduction of the Permanent Settlement permanently unsettled the future of the poor peasantry. It smashed the village community system, created a class of landlords and middlemen (who would henceforth suck the blood of the poor people) and established the concept of private property on a solid footing. In introducing this Settlement the Com-

<sup>8</sup> *The Calcutta Review*, 1858, vol. xxxi, pp 384-411.

<sup>9</sup> *District Census Handbook* (24-Parganas) 1951, appendix II p cxi, appendix IV, pp cxlii-clix. *The Calcutta Review*, 1858, Vol xxxi.

pany had two definite objectives. One was economic and the other political. The Company, which was a typical colonial power, sought to create some staunch supporters of its activities. Lord Cornwallis, the inventor of this Settlement, wrote in his letter to the Court of Directors that for its own interests the Company should make the native zamindars its allies. Lord William Bentinck, for whom the pundits have great respect, said that the Permanent Settlement had created a large number of rich zamindars who would preserve the rule of the Company in India and if necessary would exert their influence over the countrymen.<sup>10</sup> All these expectations were fulfilled. Whenever there was a rising in any part of the country, the "Bengalee Zamindar baboos" served their masters like faithful dogs.<sup>11</sup>

The increasing demands of the shareholders of the Company and the huge expenses of wars against the militant peasantry of Bihar and Bengal were a constant headache of the Court of Directors. The propertyless revenue farmers could not quench the Company's thirst for money. Hence the Directors planned to replace these persons by a new class of collectors. Thus the Permanent Settlement came into existence. "The total collections from 1794 to 1798 amounted to sicca Rs 2,65,00,000".<sup>12</sup>

The subsequent regulations were of the same vicious nature. "Section XV of Regulation VII of 1799 or the "Haptam" gave the zamindars the power of arrest before decree which they had used to serve the worst purposes. "It greatly helped the ruthless landlords to squeeze the last penny out of rackrented peasants in order to meet the revenue demands of the British as well as to make their own money".<sup>13</sup>

Regulation V of 1812 gave un-

<sup>10</sup> *Bharater Krishak Vidroha O Ganatantrik Sangram*, by Suprakash Roy, pp 134-135.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp 135.

<sup>12</sup> *The Dynamics of a Rural Society* by Ramkrishna Mukherjee, p 33.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*.

limited power to the zamindar to enhance rent provided he gave a formal written notice to the cultivator or tenant at the beginning of the Bengali year of the rent he was to pay for that year.

Act No I of 1845 or the "Sunset Law" gave ample authority to the purchaser of an estate to enhance at discretion the rents of all under-tenures in the said estate and to eject all tenants thereof.

The provisions of Act X of 1859 raised great expectations, but could give no practical relief. Even the Europeans themselves admitted these failures.<sup>14</sup>

The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 was also a failure. The zamindars continued to wallow in wealth and the poor peasants, in poverty.<sup>15</sup>

The systems in the Sunderbans were no less injurious, creating several dozens of big landowners. Those zamindars were more interested in profiteering than in reclamation or cultivation. Their peasants and labourers had to lead a miserable life in the jungles.<sup>16</sup> Not only that, the defects of the land distribution systems led to the growth of an undesirable class of speculators and middlemen and to the grinding down of the actual cultivators by excessive rent.<sup>17</sup>

Thus with the advent of the Company, an era of heinous oppression ensued. The "Diarchy" or the dual rule of Clive descended on the poor Bengal peasant as a curse. In the famine of 1770-71 when about one third of the population of the province perished, the Company collected sicca Rs 1,40,06,030. During 1771-72 the collection was sicca Rs 1,57,26,576. From Warren Hastings' letter to the Directors we know that the loss of revenue due to the death of one third of the population was made up by

severe exactions from the remaining two-thirds.<sup>18</sup>

As has been stated earlier, in the pre-British period land in Bengal was jointly possessed by the entire village community. At that time "the revenue farmers were not actually proprietors of land". So there was very little scope for the development of landholder-cum-sharecropper and supervisory farmer-cum-agricultural labourer relationships. There were two economic classes connected with land and cultivation, one was the revenue farmers or Class I and the other, the self-sufficient, self-cultivating peasantry working within the periphery of the village community or Class II.

But due to the defects of the Permanent Settlement and the subsequent regulations following it a great change came over the prevalent land system and its connective class structure. The revenue farmers gave way before the zamindars and middlemen and thus Class I lost its previous character. The disorderly situation also effected a speedy dissolution of Class II and emergence of Class III or a propertyless class of cultivators. By severe exaction and gradual enhancement of rent the zamindars evicted the peasants from their land and reduced them to the position of mere sharecroppers. This distressing condition of Class II also brought the moneylenders or mahajans to the forefront. Although they were not unknown in Hindu or Muslim India, their social role underwent a great change in the Company-regime.

As the systems of land transfer and mortgage were prevalent, the rack-rented peasants frequently approached them for loans, the mahajans thus got a good opportunity to enrich themselves. Firstly, as suppliers of loans at excessively high interest they accumulated huge wealth. Secondly, they forced the peasants to sell their crops at a very cheap rate and then started a monopoly business. Thirdly, they deprived many peasants of their "Vastoobhita" and

in course of time became owners of huge landed property.

Thus one great achievement of the Company Raj was the destitution of the once self-supporting peasantry and mushroom growth of loyal landholders "brought up in the women's apartment and sunk in sloth and debauchery". In the words of Marx it was an "unsuccessful and really absurd (and in practice infamous) experiment in economics."<sup>18a</sup>

The zamindars, talukdars, gaudidars, jotedars and other middlemen seemed to have the least respect for law and order. Besides the rent, they used to collect forcibly a number of illegal cesses. For instance: (a) Road cess—usually realised by the big landlords (Roy Chowdhurys of Baruipur, Das Mandals of Bawali—south 24-Parganas); (b) Tahari or collector's fee; (c) Agaman or Nazar (collected whenever a new naib or superior officer visited the cutchery); (d) Malik basha kharcha (fee for the zamindar's chair); (e) Hishab kharcha (fee for the accountant); (f) Mela kharcha (free for the fair); (g) Maricha (fee for marriage in the zamindar's family); (h) Parbi or bhet (fee for puja expenses collected everywhere in the Parganas); (i) Mamooly (fee for puja and other festivals); (j) Batta or exchange for sikka coin. (k) Dak Kharcha (fee for the expenses of the Zamindar's mail); (l) Proja Kharcha or tol kharcha (fee realised from the peasants for permitting them to sit in the cutchery); (m) Dakhila kharcha (fee for rent receipt).<sup>19</sup>

No excuse of natural calamities or poverty or ill health could soften the heart of the zamindar or his agent. Oppression and forcible exaction continued. The lives and properties of the peasants were left at their mercy. In their private life these zamindars,

<sup>18a</sup> Karl Marx (Capital)—quoted in the Report of the Land Revenue Commission Vol—vi, p 8.

<sup>19</sup> "Some Social and Economic Aspects of the Land system of Bengal" by Nalini Ranjan Pal, p. 134.

Some veteran peasant leaders have prepared a list of illegal cesses.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Field Commission, 1879, Quoted in *Florence Nightingale's Indian Letters*, edited by Priya Ranjan Sen, p xv.

<sup>15</sup> "What does the Bengal Peasant want?", by a member of the Bengal Provincial Civil Service—Judicial Branch (1905), p 46.

<sup>16</sup> See note 8.

<sup>17</sup> See note 8 and 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj*, by Shivnath Sastri, pp 92-93.

talukdars, jotedars and other middle men were addicted to all sorts of crimes. The contemporary literature gives a very good exposure of their private life.<sup>20</sup> Among the various means of torturing the subject population was violating the honour of their womenfolk. Once a notorious zamindar of the Sunderbans said that he had made the entire village his "harem" and every newly married girl before she entered her husband's house had to lie with him repeatedly until she conceived.<sup>21</sup>

Thus day by day the Bengal village

<sup>20</sup> *Nava Babu Bilas* and *Navá Bibi Bilas* by Bhabani Charan Banerjee.

*Hutom Penchar Naksa* by Kaliprasanna Sinha.

*Nil Darpan* etc (Almost all books and

stumbled from one crisis to another. But it will be wrong to think that the peasantry silently submitted before these misdeeds. On the contrary, they never intended to remain under the black veil which was drawn over them by their oppressors and exploiters. From the very beginning of the Company's rule they revolted against its oppressive nature.

The activities of the Parganas peasantry will be narrated in the next article.

(To be continued)

journals of the day revealed the real story of the private life of the then wealthy section of society).

<sup>21</sup> Interview: Late Kálidás Dutta, a pioneer in the study of local history of Bengal.

## The New Left

PRIMILA LEWIS

**T**HE New Left phenomenon, characterised in the main by an overwhelming revulsion against the authoritarian materialism of capitalist as well as revisionist countries, has attracted profuse comment from journalists, sociologists, psychologists and educationists of all kinds. Some of this comment has been sympathetic, much of it is anxious, and most of it is pretty incomprehending. It is good, therefore, that activists in the movement like Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Tariq Ali\* have found time to write their own version of what it is all about.

Cohn-Bendit's *Obsolete Communism The Left Wing Alternative* (already reviewed for *Frontier*) made the case for a leaderless movement with a minimum of organisation as the only means of keeping proletarian democracy alive. It is not bad leadership which suborns democracy but the very existence of leadership

\*New Revolutionaries Left Opposition

Edited by Tariq Ali  
(Peter Owen)

itself. Moreover, it was not Stalin the terrible who perverted socialism into a bureaucratic dictatorship: this began with the foundation of the Bolshevik Party and under the personal leadership of Lenin and Trotsky!

Cohn-Bendit is, of course, a direct descendant of Rosa Luxemburg and the left infants. This is not necessarily to deny him his integrity, or even to deny him a case. His form of protest and resistance is of good agitational value and can help to fan the flames of revolutionary awareness in the youth of Europe. As it is, the sordid degeneration of the left establishment and the tragic revocation of its revolutionary heritage by Russia have been a setback to the left all over the world. Were it not for the heroic struggle in Vietnam, the triumph of socialism in Cuba and the tremendous impact of the Chinese Peoples Republic, the revolutionary forces would be deflated indeed. Confronted by the emergence of bureaucratic tendencies on a world scale, the continuous concentration of capital, and the increasing inter-

vention of the State in economic and social matters, the New Left has been forced to re-examine revolutionary history, strategy and tactics. The resulting explosion of anarchists, Trotskyists, Guevaraists, Maoists and plain old Marxist-Leninists is a positive and healthy sign not only of renewed spirit and determination, but also of a profound struggle towards the realisation of the original Marxist vision of a new society and a new man.

Tariq Ali's collection, *New Revolutionaries Left Opposition*, manifests just this element of struggle to infuse in revolutionary endeavour that purity of intention, that truly democratic organisation and leadership which the old establishment has so besmirched and betrayed. It is a call to arms under the red flag (with only momentary strays into anarchy) made by some of the best known revolutionary figures in Europe and the Americas. There are stirring pieces by Regis Debray, Inti Peredo, and Fidel Castro on Latin America. Black Americans are represented by Eldridge Cleaver and Stokely Carmichael, Africa, by Chenhamo Chimutengwende from Zimbabwe (known as Rhodesia), and the Middle East by Tony Cliffe. From Europe, Western and Eastern, there are a host of student leaders, sometimes sounding a little shrill—especially those from the West—but generally sound in their resistance to the rot around them, if not in the manner they should set about correcting the malady. One thing the Europeans are perfectly clear about, and this is that the revolutionary movement *must* be based on a proletarian upsurge and organisation. They are, by and large, anti-Marcusian in their political ideology. In fact, they are Trotskyist in their bent and orientation.

### Tone And Attitude

One of the most striking things in this collection is the emergence of a clear division in tone and attitude, between those writing about the coloured, underdeveloped world and those writing about the industrialised white countries. The issues in the

former are stark, concrete, and direct; while in the latter they tend to be more abstract and ideological. I suppose the distinction boils down to the fact that in the one, the ideology derives from sheer physical deprivation in the main, while in the other, it stems from a spiritual and moral alienation from sheer material surfeit—(again, in the main.) That the two are interconnected both now and eventually, is intelligently acknowledged throughout.

The first contribution is Regis Debray's brilliant and impassioned testimony at his court martial in Camiri, Bolivia. I would like to quote large chunks of this because it is of special significance to the budding armed struggle in India. Both because of the intensified 'hunt for the Naxalites' which is rapidly attaining fascist proportions, and as a reminder of the austere principles of revolutionary behaviour. Neither in China nor in Cuba did the guerillas kill unless it was strictly necessary, and, in the case of civilians, only after every effort had been made to hold a fair trial in peoples' courts. This is a cardinal principle in any people's war. No one is an enemy *per se*. As Debray says:

"Revolutionary war is not a question of individuals facing individuals—everyone has a family, parents, sons, loved ones, a childhood. They are but mere representatives of two irreconcilable orders."

That it is people who must die is a matter of anguish, not delight. And the guiding principle must be self-defence and justice rather than vengeance.

"I want to emphasize something which is obvious to me, that in this naturally cruel struggle, despite all the difficulties involved, the guerillas fought from a position of principles, never for a moment abandoning the greatest respect for human beings, the greatest sense of humanity. All the wounded were cared for with the best facilities available; prisoners were cared for, fed. Blankets were provided to protect them from the night cold. It has been said that the dead and the prisoners, or some of

them, were stripped of their personal effects. Their boots, yes, because in the jungle boots are a vital necessity and the guerillas had no shoemaker. Their uniforms, yes, because the guerillas have no one to make uniforms nor cloth to make them out of, and the army has these things. However prisoners were given civilian clothing."

And again: "...we were running short of medicine, especially glucose. When one doctor, before starting out, asked Che if it were not preferable to save part of the liquid glucose available for the use of the guerillas, since there was no way to replenish the supply, Che answered that this could not even be taken into consideration and, if necessary, the supplies on hand should be all used up to save their (the prisoners) lives, that, whatever the cost, the enemy wounded must be treated, even when they were in a hopeless condition. As for the accusations concerning theft and looting, I believe that it is not necessary to go further into the matter: it is well known that, aside from the weapons captured, nothing was stolen from the prisoners. Not a single piece of meat, not one potato, not a single kernel of corn was ever taken or confiscated from a farmer without payment, at a price set by the farmer himself. And when the owner of the farm was absent, an amount of money equivalent to the value of the products appropriated was left with a peon."

Of course, in the case of rich and exploiting farmers and landlords this scrupulousness can be abandoned. But the principle, both in terms of essential humanity and integrity and in view of the enormous political advantages that accrue to it, is a fundamental one.

Debray is fearless in his affirmation that armed struggle is the key to the liberation struggle. The point of his defence was that he was being penalized for his intentions rather than his deeds. But in any case, he could not allow a political sentence for an ideological crime to be passed off as a sentence for a common crime.

"Except for the mentally sick and

the fascists, no one likes men to have to make history by killing. But if you want to talk about crimes, where are the innocent ones? All of us here—judges as well as defendants—are accomplices to crimes. You do not represent peace and happiness, while we represent violence and pain. Each one has to decide which side he is on—on the side of military violence or guerilla violence, on the side of violence that represses, or violence that liberates. Crimes in the face of crimes. Which ones do we choose to be jointly responsible for, accomplices or accessories to? You choose certain ones, I choose others—period."

The call for proletarian armed struggle comes like a breath of fresh air from Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as Britain, West Germany and France in this book. On Poland, Jacek Kuron and Karel Modzelewski, both in jail for their opposition to the Gomulka regime, write of the worsening economic and social crisis in that country as a result of which large sections of the workers and the youth have become alienated and restive against the grip of the bureaucracy:

"Formerly, exploitation was covered up by compulsory, sloganized and sometimes authentic enthusiasm. The powers-that-be liked to put on overalls and prided themselves on their working class origins. They decorated shock workers and found it unfitting to pay the manager ten times as much as the workers. Today, the authorities wear elegant suits and the manager who knows best how to squeeze the surplus product out of the workers is a positive hero of socialist construction, while his villa and car are visible symbols of his social prestige and civic virtue. Today exploitation is evident and visible to all and its tool is not propaganda or forced enthusiasm, but the whip of economic penalty, of administrative coercion and—in the cases of organised attempts at resistance—of police violence. Today, the trade unions, jointly with the government and together with the managements, execute resolutions and decisions on firing the workers (Operation R)."

# Calcutta Diary

CHARAN GUPTA

According to this view, it is only the Moscow-liners who see the CIA behind every liberation move in Eastern Europe. Not that the CIA is not invariably scavenging about, but there is little doubt that the movements in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia are revolutionary rather than counter-revolutionary. On the other hand, although "Liberalizing" and "Liberating" moves are not contradictory, extreme care must be taken to preserve and continue the *revolutionary* content in all these movements.

Other than these, there is a solid contribution from Tony Cliffe analysing the Middle East situation, the machinations of Zionism and imperialism, and the need for a radical solution, plus guerilla warfare rather than the conventional warfare so far deployed against Israel.

Stokely Carmichael makes the point that the Black struggle in the United States will become the first line of defence against US imperialism, and Eldridge Cleaver in a beautiful piece of writing exults in the discovery by the Black American of the way of armed resistance to 'Whitey'. From Chenhamo Chimutengwende we get a good picture of the situation in colonial Africa, but he gives too diluted a hint of the terrible degeneration and corruption of the leadership of the Liberation movements in Africa today. Tariq Ali is his redoubtable self and he makes mention of the Naxalbari uprising as evidence that the Indian revolution too, is beginning to rear its head at last.

This is on the whole a book worth reading. It provides a wide perspective of the New Left all over the world today, and that the point of convergence is the need for revolutionary armed struggle is an indication, if nothing else, not only of the speed and excellence of mass communication, but also of a historical stage in social development.

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NOT being an established angel, I have no fear of treading. Newspapers keep writing fatuous comments on the running violence in West Bengal, particularly in Calcutta. Would-be-out-of-job parliamentarians chime in; outside pundits discover China lurking here, there, everywhere; some suggest a possible link in the chain with the alleged happenings in East Pakistan; gentlemen-politicians, including even those belonging to that idiocy which passes as the United Front, contribute their mite of holy scare; political eunuchs, cut off from the people, dream of another pleasure-rendering emasculation a la Dharma Vira. In face the non-happening of any disturbances in the first three days of the 4th test must have caused a great deal of disappointment to these circles.

Ah, but all was not lost even last week: there was the armed robbery in the Park Street branch of the State Bank of India, with its impressive haul; what was still lovelier, the mayhem which prevented the release of Satyajit Ray's latest film. We can now sit back and watch the spectacle of call-attention motions in the Lok Sabha. Any damned stick to bash West Bengal with. Besides, such a nation-stirring event as the non-release of Satyajit Ray's latest is not just any damned stick...

\* \* \*

But in any case let me have a go. I am a great admirer of Satyajit Ray's craft; a great admirer of his creations, which are several notches above the run-of-the-mill products of the score-odd of other Calcutta directors; a great admirer of the poetry which runs in his scenarios, of his gentle humour, of his genius for locating new, sensitive faces; of his flair for turning out something out of nothing. The development of Bengali imagination since the mid-1950s owes a great deal to his activities; this statement will stand even when one remembers simultaneously the

contributions of the poets and writers, of Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar, of the contemporary generation of painters, of Suchitra Mitra. It is hardly surprising that Ray's films have turned into such excellent money-spinners, at least in Bengal. The mass audience in the rest of India by, and large are still not impressed by his creations; but no matter, they have a steady, admiring clientele outside the country, and, in addition, of course the home base of the Bengali-speaking populace.

It is thus hardly surprising that distributors will clamour for the rights to release his films, to release them in preference to the creations of other directors, and to release them as quickly as they can. On the face of it, there is nothing wrong with such an attitude; it is the competitive elan at work. Come one, come all; compete for making good pictures; if you produce a good movie, the people will love it, the distributors will love it, and your future will be made; if the picture is bad, it will be otherwise; gradually, through the natural process of elimination, good pictures will drive out bad pictures, the audience will be happy, the distributors will be happy, and those who discover that their talent is not as good as Satyajit Ray's will migrate elsewhere in the hope of doing better...

This is the classical proposition of *laissez faire*, and, as I have just said, on the face of it, there is nothing wrong with its application in any field, *provided it is allowed to work*. I am afraid it is not being allowed to work in the film industry in West Bengal. The pivotal point of the perfect competition hypothesis is that the consumers are the ultimate arbiter, they will decide between the good and the bad and the indifferent. In the present instance, I am afraid the audience in West Bengal are being shut out from making the choice, the film distributors, on their own, are pre-empting the choice by showing a

predilection for certain films produced by certain directors headed by Satyajit Ray, and by brushing aside the claim of others. This is the very negation of the so-called competitive spirit.

Let me pick an analogy from agriculture. There are close to 360 million people jostling in Indian agriculture, but it nonetheless presents a picture of unrelieved monopoly, with the top 10 per cent ruling the roost. They can do so because of the built-in advantage they have: they have cornered the land. Even assuming that you have the talent and the resources, you can still do nothing in agriculture in case you are without land. Once shut out from land, you are inalienably shut out from the process of cultivation; roughly a quarter of our total agricultural population are without a spec of land; another quarter do not have more than 2 acres per family; at the other end, the top 10 per cent hog nearly 65 per cent of the net cultivable area. This basic monopoly in land gives rise to other cognate forms of non-competition, in the distribution of credit, in the supply of irrigation water and fertilisers, in the supply of government bounty... The inequalities in the distribution of land lead on to an ever expanding vicious circle of accentuating inequalities all around, until we are next door to Naxalbari.

What land is to agriculture, the outlets for distribution are to the production of motion pictures. At any given moment there are only a certain number of halls licensed to exhibit films. You go down the list, and you will discover that the ownership of these halls is extremely narrowly held within a small coterie of proprietors-distributors. There lies the rub. Outwardly one is paying homage to free competition, while the reality is that an informal consortium of directors-producers-distributors can decide what to release for the public, and in what order. Those who do not belong to the consortium do not have a chance: they may have the talent, but they will have no opportunity to invite the public to

sit on judgment on the quality of their talent: the process of competition will be used to smother all competition to the established gentlemen.

Meanwhile, there is the awesome social aspect of this unequal situation. In a given year, better directors like Satyajit Ray can produce only a limited number of pictures. There are others, producers, directors, actors and actresses, cameramen, scenario writers, painters, soundtracksmen, and umpteen other technicians, outside the charmed circle. They do not belong to the Establishment; the latter cannot provide for them; yet, they have to eke a living. Other films are therefore produced, more or less at a steady rate, in the hope that halls will be made available for their distribution and there will be a certain return from the box-offices. If, however, the halls are denied to these pictures, so much money is locked up; the banks cannot be repaid their advances, interest charges keep piling up, no new venture can get started, the technicians and ordinary workers have to be laid off, and a first-rate crisis, with its repercussions in several other areas in the economy, cannot be headed off.

I hold no brief for what is known as the Chalachitra Sangrakshan Samity. From what I have heard, it is a shoddy, faction-ridden outfit, often given to an urge for cutting of corners. But to pretend therefore that there is no threat of monopolistic depredations in the Bengal film industry and the hooligans who damage cinema houses should be given the proper law-and-order treatment, period, will be only a shade less than scandalous. After all, some kind of compromise had been hammered out at sessions held under the auspices of the State Government on the order of release for the completed films. It is atrocious that that formula will now be sought to be evaded on specious grounds. Nobody, however talented he may be, should be permitted to assert the supremacy of his whim over what is in accord with the social milieu.

So that is that. Like it or not, social pressure has to prevail over individual greed. We all exist as part of society; society's problems are inter-locked with our own well-being; we cannot opt out, neither can we set ourselves up as superior entities for whom society's writ does not exist. Industrialists occasionally threaten to take their capital out of this State because they dislike the ethos of the environment here; till now, their bark has been worse than their bite, and for obvious reasons: West Bengal abounds in certain natural advantages for industry, which the capitalists cannot quite ignore. I guess those who threaten to take their film-making out of West Bengal are indulging in fulminations of the same vintage; take out the back-drop of Bengal and the Bengali dialogue, and their pictures will be dreary, empty forms. So, like it or not, they will have to stay. And in case they do, they will have to conform to the minimum social conventions here. The alternative is violence, which too performs a key social function now and then: it prevents genius from going to the head.

### Book Review

ECONOMIC PLANNING AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION  
Selected writings of Sachin Chaudhuri.  
Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay. Pp. viii + 176. Rs. 20.00

THE sum of the parts never adds up to the whole. Sachin Chaudhuri was much more than a great editor; aspects of his personality show-up in his attachment to poetry, his passion for music, his life-long love affair with the classics, and in his myriad moods of joy, charm and subtlety revealed in his conversations and letters. In the truest sense, he was the compleat man. The editorial pieces in the old *Economic Weekly* certainly caught some of the nuances of his many-splendoured personality, but not all. Besides, the editor too is much more than the author of

editorial comments: the spirit he breathes has a particular kind of indivisibility, spilling beyond the delicate first few pages of the journal. It is the totality which represents the core of an editor's functional talent: the manner of his selection of areas of coverage, the style he brings to bear while picking themes and contributors, the courage he shows in his insertions and excisions. Isolated quotes can perhaps provide some glimpse of the aggregate exquisiteness, but, alas, it is still necessary to own up, Gertrude Steinishly, that a glimpse is a glimpse.

I therefore cannot help confessing to a feeling of disappointment with this collection of Sachin Chaudhuri's essays, mostly culled out from the old files of the *Economic Weekly*. A majority of the pieces deal with economic policy in general, and planning in particular. Maybe because of the retrospective knowledge that we have acquired of the futility of the efforts which went into economic planning during those euphoric days between the middle 1950's and the middle 1960's these essays have today an air of unreality about them. It is not just that they are dated; what makes them mustier is the manner in which particular problems are analysed: in many cases, the style has a kind of academic naivete which appears pale in today's light.

I daresay it should have been possible, if only a little extra effort were expended, to choose a larger number of such pieces as would have stood out independently of their context; if this were done, this anthology would have been more meaningful, given its objective of presenting the best specimen of Sachin Chaudhuri's prose as applied to the cultivation of 'cogent thought and expression'. Nevertheless, the shadow would fall. Why deny that yesterday's themes do not wear well any more; yesterday's style, over time, gets shrivelled into a mere memory of a mannerism? In going through this volume, one is more often checkmated by the discussion of time-bound issues than assisted towards forming an integrated judgment about the

personality of the man who wrote the pieces. The topics covered seem mostly irrelevant: it is the occasional little asides which hold attention. For these asides contain the quintessence of Sachin Chaudhuri's wisdom and vision; they reveal the courage of the man, the deep moral fibre which twined his spirit, and the broad liberal hue which coloured his imagination.

For example, listen to him in the following passage, circa 1954, on the issue of land reforms, wherein he does not hold back from castigating his hero, Jawaharlal Nehru; his moral sense had been thoroughly outraged by some of the sham goings-on actively connived at by officialdom:

"The ownership of land has little to do with the pattern and technique of cultivation—the unit of cultivation is very different from that of ownership. Nor is the substance of ownership revealed by the legal titles. The legal titles to land may be in many hands, but the substance of ownership, viz., control over disposal, remains in the hands of a few. The census of land holdings, which is to bring out the variety of conditions prevailing in the different States and provide the data on which the policy of redistribution is to be eventually formulated, will be a colossal waste of time, money and effort unless these basic considerations are borne in mind. But are these the data that the Ministry of Agriculture is looking for and is unable to find? Even if the right data are collected and correct principles of distribution are laid down, there is little assurance that they will be implemented. The agency for implementation, whether at the State, district or village level, has a vested interest in land holding. To enlist the support of the land-owning class in the execution of measures for its own extinction is like "negotiating with the tiger for its skin". It is not going to be easy. It may be that history will repeat itself and the owning classes will go down bravely, holding on to what they have, rather than accept

a change. But could Pandit Nehru have lost his sense of history to go over to the other side?"

Again listen to him in the quotation that follows, railing against the powers that be for the deliberate churning up of a McCarthy-type haze in the unreal atmosphere in the wake of the clash with China:

"There is a state of emergency in the country and a nationwide preparation for defence. A stream of emissaries has been going abroad to secure arms aid to strengthen and build up our defence potential. The President of India is in the United States on the same mission. What is this defence effort for? To defend the country and the freedom and the democratic rights of the people which we hold so dear. It is not only our borders that we are to defend. The borders are merely a physical frame within which the people have inherited and built up something which they want to safeguard and preserve. It is the values they hold dear which people defend with their lives, not the rocks, stones and trees, acres or square miles of land.

"The things we want to safeguard and preserve, for which is this defence effort, form one indivisible whole, the content of which is individual freedom—the right to hold one's head high, the right to think for oneself, to pursue the truth unafraid, unhampered by authority, and freedom of thought and expression. The limits of freedom of action for an individual are well known; they are obvious and accepted. They begin with the restrictions on where we cross the path in a busy thoroughfare. But how far can they go without destroying the very content of freedom and diminishing man in the process? Constant nibbling of this freedom goes on all the time. The process is unending and will remain unending unless it is checked, and checks can come only from protest, and prompt warning from those who are in the special position of custodians of this freedom—the legislators, the judiciary, the legal

# International Film Festival

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

profession and the Press. To repeat, nibbling goes on all the time—there has been a noticeable lack of vigilance and timely action if not inertia and apathy on the part of those who are charged with safeguarding freedom and preventing encroachments upon it. It starts with small things which go almost unnoticed such as putting the onus of proof, the proof of innocence, on the suspect in prohibition cases some years ago. It was a flagrant violation of the fundamental principle of the legal system of the country that one is assumed to be innocent until one's guilt has been proved in a court of law."

These passages, which are gems of this kind, have to be culled out from the stray pages of the volume. There are several like these, tucked away here and there, and have to be savoured through a leisurely browsing of the book.

To at least one reader, this is the principal gain to be derived from the publication of this volume of essays. For those who would aspire to have a systematic presentation of the processes of thought of either Sachin Chaudhuri or of the *Economic Weekly*, the collection could be disappointing. Of course, the fact that Chaudhuri was a great Nehru liberal seeps through every now and then from the pieces brought together; but that he was more than a Nehru liberal, and that his thinking consisted of much more than some of the commoner naivetes which featured Nehru and his immediate entourage, will not be laid bare by this book. For that, one will still have to fall back on the remembrance of the personality of the man, as he was and as he lived.

A.M.

## NOTICE

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Business Manager  
Frontier

IF the Gandhi Centenary celebration has been the non-event par excellence, the International Film Festival in Delhi has been the anti-event of the year. The objects of a film festival, I have been told, are, on the one hand, to promote trade and tourism, and, on the other, to acquaint the film-makers here with the best in world cinema today and thereby stimulate and excite their imagination. It is also supposed to foster the growth of film consciousness among the cinema going public; to improve, in other words, the taste and film appreciation of those on whom depends ultimately the generation of a climate which favours the creative efforts of those who can and want to make good films. The choice of Delhi as the venue ruled out in one sweeping stroke the achievement of any of these objectives.

Delhi is not exactly the place where you hope to market or trade in films. Those engaged in the business of sale or distribution of films are, naturally enough, near places where films are actually made. Even such a staunch supporter and protagonist of the festival as the film critic of the Delhi edition of *The Statesman* reported when the fortnight festival was ten days gone that "one of the foreign delegations was heard asking where was the trade part of the festival for sale and buying of films". The delegation might as well have asked about the wholesale market for eelskins in Delhi.

As for tourism, since it is the dollar that we are principally after, I do not see why an American should bother to come all the way to attend a film festival in India when he can go to other, more famous, ones nearer home. He comes to India for various worthy, unworthy or frivolous reasons but a film festival is certainly not one of them.

But then we are a spiritual and progressive nation. We disdain to value overmuch the material benefits

that other and unholier-than-us people want to collect from such bonanzas as film festivals. Our festivals are meant to serve a wider artistic purpose. Or, so one would gather from the profuse publicity material dished out. One would however be hard put to find a place in India more unsuitable than Delhi for achieving such a purpose. Delhi is known for its place in history and for its prolific growth of monuments, buildings, contractors and bureaucrats, but it is not exactly a place where artistic film makers, potential and actual, live and work. The stage for the anti-event was perfectly set.

## Nudes and all that

Nor did the unfolding of the play disappoint. An enormous apparatus for mounting the festival was set up and run by a minor functionary of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. A few weeks before the inauguration when the films had started arriving and the screening committee had begun its labours there were anxious enquiries about the number of European, particularly French, films. Soon the wives of the senior bureaucrats came to hear of it, and then the wives of the middling and the junior ones. After that there could be no question of the I & B Ministry officials not holding repeated screenings of those films where, it soon got round, the actresses bared their breasts and impatiently jumped into beds. An official, after all, has his career to think of, and how can you blame him if his superiors or their wives want to see frontal close-ups of nudes? And when sneak screenings had to be arranged why not oblige personal friends and their wives?

As for the public, to improve whose film consciousness a film festival is supposed to be held, the Delhi public gave a display of remarkable heightened consciousness even before the festival opened. In no time at

all it got to the heart of the matter, which is that a film in a festival marked "A" meant a nude. Several nudes and perhaps the act—the more knowledgeable of the public secretly hoped and darkly hinted at. Needless to say no tickets were available except on the black market for films marked "A". I used to loiter about in front of a few cinemas hoping for the odd chance of someone selling a spare ticket. On one such occasion I had gone to a cinema where Stanly Donen's film about homosexuals was being shown. I was early for the night show, the evening show was not yet over. Suddenly a couple of irate citizens came out emitting forth a volley of choice Punjabi expletives. They had paid, it appeared, eighteen rupees for a two-rupee ticket and "there was, dammit, no young woman at all in the film". They felt cheated and naturally resented the fact.

Tickets for films from Asian countries were, more or less, easily available. For Bert Haanstra's documentary *Voices in the Water* there was no problem at all. As I was buying a ticket just before the show a prospective but hesitant buyer by my side asked me if there was likely to be "hot" scenes in this film.

Nor were elements of anti-event absent in the attendant gala and glamour. The festival was inaugurated by the President himself in the glittering convention hall of the Ashoka Hotel. Here is the account of the function as reported in the Delhi edition of the *Indian Express*. "The Convention Hall of Ashoka Hotel, the main venue for the inaugural function was a sight of unexpected hooliganism totally lacking in planning and arrangement. A large number of special invitees, including foreign delegates, were unable to secure seats. After the function was over it was impossible for the dignitaries to leave the Hall. The crowd

mobbed them from all sides. Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand were the main targets".

A report in the Delhi edition of *The Statesman* about one of the many other functions was: "Most of the foreign delegates to the Film Festival in Delhi had to go to the second row and further back at a reception given to them at the Red Fort as many of the seats meant for the delegates were taken by the hosts and their families."

#### Symposium

The official may be partial to his family but let it not be assumed that he did not have any regard for the intellectual aspect of a film festival. The Festival Director arranged for an impressive symposium with impressive themes on different days. I have of course no idea of what was discussed. Doubtless the papers read were brilliant as were the ideas on cinema, expounded and exchanged. I only mildly wondered at the PIB hand-out description of the Director of the National School of Drama who presided on one of the days as "a great film personality". I do not know if Mr Alkazi took it as a compliment. There was of course no question of any wonder that on another day a high official presided. The surprise was that high officials did not preside on all the days. Never mind what the subject is, films or finger prints, the heaven born solves all problems, dissolves all doubts. All wisdom emanates from the bureaucrat's navel, all knowledge.

The anti-success of the festival could not, however, be the grand affair it has been if entries did not play their part. Unfortunately I have no knowledge of films. I could, in any case, see only a few. I am therefore unable to say anything about the quality of the films shown. But a friend who knows a great deal about films and who saw many of the competitive entries told me that most countries appear to have sent *their* Hindi films for the competition. Thus anti-films, appropriately enough, contributed handsomely to the anti-event just concluded.

## The Prince And The Pauper

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

**B**OTH *Aparichito* (directed by Salil Dutta) and *Prince* (directed by Lekh Tandon) are studies of misfits, a good-hearted, simple young man fallen among city vultures and a tyrant prince turning into a commoner. *Aparichito's* story-structure resembles Dostoevsky's *Idiot* in its basic form (nowhere acknowledged in the film's credits, though) minus Dostoevsky's pungent social criticism of the top drawers of a big metropolis seen through the innocent eyes of Myushkin, the principal character who is just back to the city from a mental asylum. Here he has been portrayed as a queer mixture of a mental case and the wise fool of the Shakespearean genre. His entanglement with Suneeta (Dostoevsky's Natasha, the cute demi-monde), and Mullick (Rogozhin, the lovable brute) forms the core of the film, carrying in its wake canloads of foolish debate on right, wrong, good, evil, love, infatuation and what have you. The tampering with Dostoevsky is complete in the film, although the director has failed to come out with an independent output, so that the richness and perception of the original have disappeared, and we are left with an over-simplified, intrigue-ridden conventional melodrama, with the characters, stripped of their complexities, becoming mere props, papier mache figures sauntering in and out of the scenes without rhyme or reason. The nineteenth-century Russian milieu of a decadent aristocracy shaken to its roots by the conflicts between nihilism and Christian values does not fit into the modern set-up of the film and transposition of the original background onto an urban industrial society with all the vices that money can buy, has not been convincing at all. Soumitra Chatterjee's portrayal of Myushkin's wide-eyed innocence is a little overstretched and Uttamkumar's render-

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ing of Rogozhin (a sort of Fairbanks in a Ferrari) as the man you love to hate, is plainly ridiculous. But the worst performance comes from Aparna Sen as Suneeta-Natasha. In her attempts to simulate the depths of feeling which she is not normally capable of she looks quite funny, whereas in her frivolous moments, she tries to ape her Bombay counterparts, but lacking their physical attainments, she is quite hopeless in those feats and her efforts become just the pathetic swaying of the sagging limbs.

#### Prince

The *Prince* has Shammi Kapoor whining and hamming through the long grind of eighteen reels in his attempts to find peace of mind which all the luxuries of the royal palace cannot provide. This he ultimately finds and Vyjayanthimala comes as a bonus, but not before the spectators have been robbed of their good night's sleep. This orgiastic celluloid extravaganza in garish colour has all the familiar elements, the cloak and dagger game with the bandits, the horses and horseplay beautifully matched, the last-minute rescue of the hero in a difficult predicament and the ubiquitous Rajendranath and Helen.

## The Pride And The Passion

BY A DRAMA CRITIC

**C**RITICS have equated Tennessee Williams' plays with autopsy on living bodies. He subjects his characters to an almost clinical examination, carefully searching out their inhibitions, emotions and contradictions. Drawn with meticulous care, his characters are always human, although superficially appearing a bit larger than life. The recent production of his *Night Of The Iguana* by the Amateurs brings out the essence of his philosophy. Compared to his other works, this play is quite simple in its construction and content. Done

in one single set, a run-down hotel on a hill top in Mexico where the Reverend T. Lawrence Shanon, a defrocked minister of the church, takes out a busload of women on a conducted tour, the production has explored Tennessee Williams' territory quite well, retaining all his marvellous theatrical effects and the spell-binding characterisation. For Shanon, this trip is a voyage of discovery to find out his personal god who has been denied to him by small-town bourgeois inhibitions. He feels the need for rapport between souls, on the one hand, which he seeks to achieve by physical contacts, and on the other, he is always bugged by his tormenting feeling about "man's inhumanity to God". This leads to his dual existence, living on the fantastic level and operating on the realistic one, and this chasm between truth and reality has been laid bare by Vimal Bhagat's moving performance as Shanon. Shanon's antithesis, or should we say complementary, in this play is Hannah Jelkes, the poor painter who arrives on the scene with her "ninety-seven years young" grandfather Nonno, the world's oldest living and practising poet. The growth of an understanding between her and Shanon is the most tender part of the play and these scenes have been handled by the director in a delicate and subtle manner. Pamela Perks' rendering of the difficult part of Hannah affirms her skill as a gifted actress with deep understanding of the dramatist's intentions. Credits are due also to Mrs Nita Pillai for her sensitive direction and to R. S. Pillai for an expressive decor creating a true backdrop to this violent interplay of emotions.

#### Letters

### "Communist Triangle"

Most of the writers in your weekly seem to live on the frontiers of CPI(M) and CPI(ML) and, if the letters published are any indication, your readers' circle is overwhelmingly in favour of the latter. Even a slight "deviation" is caught here

with crusading spirit. This is good provided it does not suffocate perhaps the only clear avenue of yours for independent thinking so essential for a correct reading of the various Marxist experiments in the country.

Because of some personal "difficulty" in this turbulent Bihar coalfield I was rather late in taking note of Mr M. N. D. Nair's comment (November 15) on my article (October 18). Any discussion on this communist confusion — neo-confusionism—if it is to emit more light than heat must limit itself to objective analysis rather than jump to attribute any motive. Our entire argument ends if we start with the notion "the CPI(M) will never help the revolutionaries to capture a city", sounding more as a slander than a critical judgment. If the CPI(M) has been sufficiently "tamed" to give up its revolutionary designs why has the entire reactionary block ranging from Rajnarayan, Vajpayee to Chavan pinpointed its attack on the CPI(M)? Why is the Bangla Congress upset and fasting? If Mr Jyoti Basu is an arch revisionist why did he withdraw all cases against the pure revolutionaries of Naxalbari when there was not even the slightest movement to put any pressure for their release and specially when the country is in a "neo-colonial stage" supposed to close all room for liberalism even as a political manoeuvre? Despite all the mistakes, the very fact that the CPI(M) is the first target of the reactionaries shows that it still constitutes the biggest revolutionary potential and is not to be alienated. Mr Nair talked of revolutionary movements in Andhra, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Regarding the Srikakulam struggle I would request *Frontier* to provide us firsthand information to enable any comment, and unlike Telengana it should not remain as an island in this Indian ocean of politics in the absence of a correct picture. But regarding Bihar and UP I would only say, though the dream of revolution is good, facts should not be substituted by fiction, specially when evaluating a revolutionary stra-

tegy where precision in details is absolutely necessary. But the development of Gopiballavpur has correctly proved my contention that the victory of the CPI (M) in elections is even helpful in developing the activities of the CPI (ML), not to speak of other movements. Otherwise after making Naxalbari during the first UF regime why it has to wait for the second UF Government to create a Gopiballavpur? It appears, even those who would create noise in your weekly over the sending of Eastern Frontier Rifles have an "underground faith" in the indulgence of the CPI (M) that it would try to minimise the bite of repression if it is not completely possible to eliminate that altogether in the present set-up, and so they can go to any jungle and start a revolution.

My main point of emphasis is that the elements of unity between the three communist parties are still much more numerous than those of division, and the polemics resorted to by the three in equal pitch is only to hide this hard fact. This is no revolutionary politics but crude middle-class individualism corrupting the Marxist organisations and would prove catastrophic in view of the split within the Congress party and the resulting sudden vacuum surely indicating a political cyclone.

ARUN KUMAR ROY  
Sindri, Bihar

### Between Two Stools

What is the ideological (?) content of the downfall of the CPM Ministry in Kerala and the installation of the CPI Ministry? It is the "triumph" of "National Democracy" over "People's Democracy"! National Democracy asks the faithful to follow the bourgeoisie and swallow it little by little as Mohan Kumaramangalam, Chandrajeet Yadav and K. R. Ganesh are doing. On the other hand 'People's Democracy' wants the bourgeoisie to follow the faithful. So these two opposite pulls cannot go together. Then one

may ask how they pulled together for more than two years in Kerala. It is because the National Democracy-wallahs being more helpless in the State of Kerala were just waiting for the time to pull down the People's Democracy-wallahs. This also is a question of "polarisation!"

Every passing day in India shows that hypocrisy can no longer survive. The most hypocritical among the Indian political parties being the CPM, it was easily disowned by the rapid development of Indian political conditions towards a real confrontation of the haves with the have-nots. The CPM has either to go with the enlightened capitalist agents like the Indicate and the CPI or disappear from the political scene. It can't go on fooling the people for ever.

M. N. D. NAIR  
Trivandrum

### Kerala Despatches

Mr Suraj Singh, Delhi, writing under the caption, 'Rank and File' (November 29), wants you to advise Ramji to write in the official journal of the CPI (M). The implication is that Ramji is a rabid partisan of that party.

As a regular and careful reader of *Frontier*, particularly of the Kerala features which deal with subjects I know personally, I am surprised at this sweeping assumption. Obviously, Mr Singh has not read some of the earlier features by Ramji in which he severely criticised the inability of the Marxist party to implement popular measures while it was in power and in a position to do so. So far Ramji has always struck me as impartial in his assessment of politics and political parties in his State and his yardstick has always been based on radical Left values and ideology.

I could point out how he had had occasion to give bouquets to even the State Youth Congress organisation when it took any progressive stance.

Mr Singh evidently does not like Ramji's comment on the current peasant struggle in Kerala. I could state,

on the basis of facts, that in this agitation by the peasants, the Marxists have a dynamic people-oriented role.

Mr Singh, I should say, is in no position, from his perch in Delhi, to sit in judgment over the grass-root-level incidents happening in Kerala or elsewhere in the countryside.

P. RAJAN  
Cochin

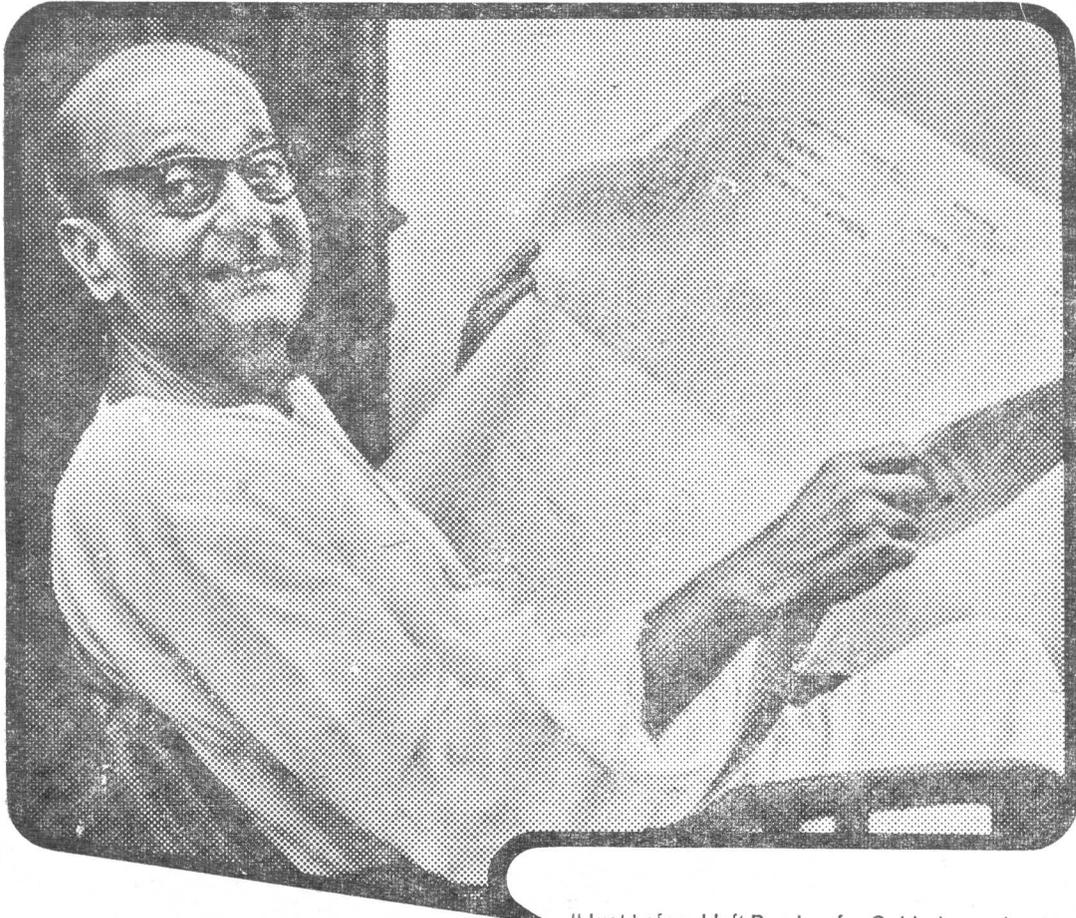
### Commerce And Industry

You were less than trenchant when you let off the Commerce and Industry Minister, Mr Dhara, with the comment (December 6) that he is not the only exception so far as the UF performance is concerned. But the employees of the Commerce and Industry Department can prove that this department is functioning not only as inefficiently as under the corrupt Congress regime which brought all the State Government's industrial ventures to their present impasse, but also in a corrupt manner, with businessmen providing funds for the Minister's party. In fomenting inter-union rivalry in con-fabulation with CPI representatives who have been inducted into the Board of Directors as 'workers' representatives', the ministerial hand is none too clean. In fact Mr Dhara's activities are aimed at sabotaging the workers' movement and shifting the blame to the workers and employees in general for the lamentable performance of his Ministry. That corrupt officials and bureaucrats are having their heyday is, therefore, no wonder. You were equally wrong when you castigated only the 'habitual shirkers and idlers' of the State Transport Department for the failure in improving the transport system. The IAS (nominated) bureaucrat selected by the UF to head this department miserably failed in handling Durgapur Projects affairs during President's rule. Indeed various charges against him were sent to the UF Cabinet after the formation of the UF Government.

A. GANGULY, A. K. BOSE  
Durgapur

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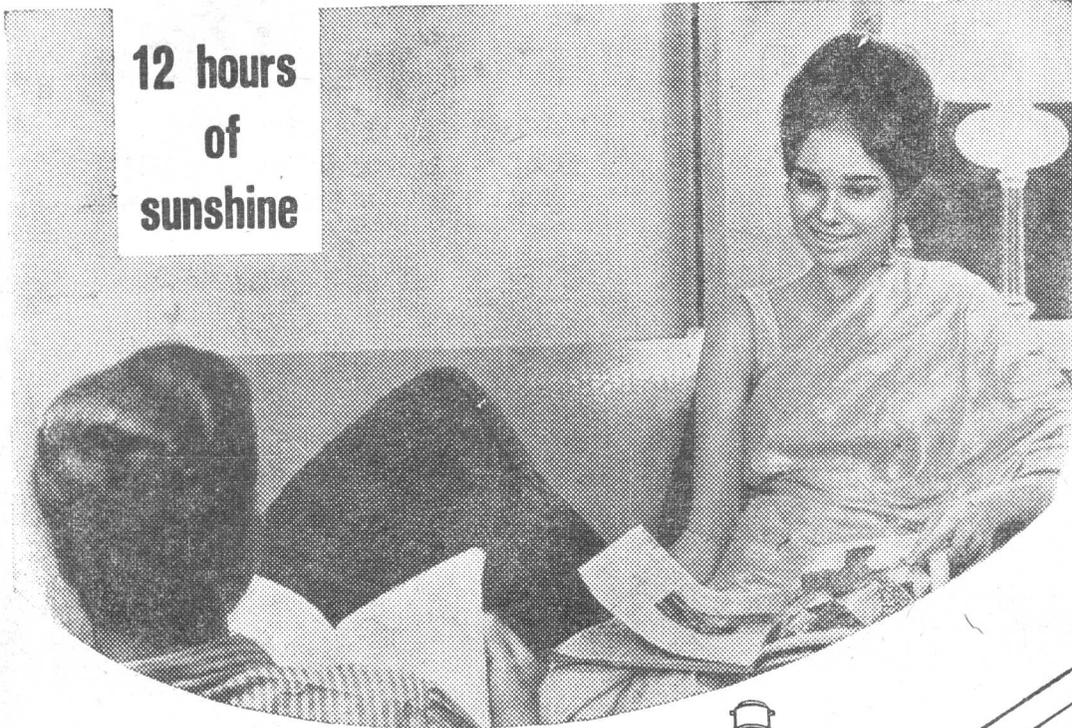
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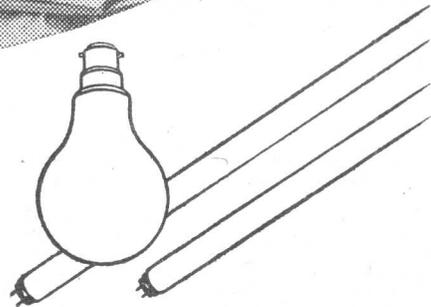
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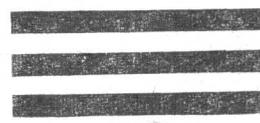
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