

frontier

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RAY OF DESPAIR

ADMINISTRATION in West Bengal has been in a sordid mess for several years. Within a week of taking over, the Centre, with its consummate skill for bungling, has thrown another spanner of yet unguaged mischief into the works in the shape of Mr Siddhartha Sankar Ray. Normally, a minister without portfolio does not have any specific responsibility; he is supposed to have his finger—or foot, depending on his proclivity and relationship with the Prime Minister—in every pie. Mr Ray has not been authorised to play the role of such a Jack of all trades; he has been made master of the West Bengal situation. In other circumstances, such an appointment could have been construed as the thin end of a process to ease out a minister. As Minister of Education, Social Welfare and Culture, Mr Ray has not been a famous success, though he is certainly not without company in this respect. Maybe, his transfer will clear the way for a rising star. Such manoeuvres are inevitable in a monolith that the Congress(R) has become. But his latest assignment is by no means a sign of denigration, for the problems of West Bengal rank high on the Centre's list of priorities, not so much for the sake of the harried people of the State as for rehabilitating the ruling party.

Since the promulgation of the Constitution President's rule has been imposed on States to keep out non-Congress ministries or to help Congress ministries out of impossible situations on twenty-six different occasions; but never before had a Union Minister been placed in charge of the affairs of a State under President's rule. In practice, President's rule is a myth; it is the Union Home Ministry which has so long presided over the destiny of a State supposed to be ruled by the President. There is no reason for the Home Ministry, which must have been looking forward to the acquisition of another satrapy,—its empire already includes Gujarat, Mysore, and Punjab—to be elated over Mr Ray's appointment. Of course, there cannot be any question of a conflict at the top, for the Prime Minister herself is Home Minister. She is the monarch of all she surveys and not surveys, but that may be poor consolation for lesser lights who may see in Mr Ray an interloper of sorts. Even on the State level! frictions may be unavoidable, for neither the Governor nor the bureaucracy is obliged to take orders from him. The Governor has already made it known what he thinks of Mr Ray's status by allotting the Deputy

Chief Minister's room in the Secretariat to Mr Ray and giving unto himself the room of the Chief Minister. Obviously, in his juridical wisdom he does not think of the Union Minister in charge of West Bengal affairs as anything more than a glorified Adviser. Mr Ray has assured that he will not tread on anybody's toes; even if he is sincere, his success will depend to a large extent on how big somebody's toes are.

These are, of course, matters not of much relevance to the people of West Bengal. Dissension at policy-making levels is not new to them; they have learnt to live with it. Their only concern is whether the regime will let them alone, whether it will allow them to live in peace or whatever of it is left in the State. Apparently, the new regime has no such intention. In the midst of a ponderous enunciation of what he proposes to do to ameliorate conditions in West Bengal Mr Ray has sent out troops to Birbhum and other districts. In other spheres he may be still feeling his way, but so far as law and order is concerned he seems to have come with a full brief. The situation in Birbhum, as readers of this journal know well, is far from normal. But the army is not the answer; if anything, the presence of the army will alienate the people further, for army action, in spite of the best of intentions, is bound to be indiscriminate as the troops know neither the area, nor the language and to them every citizen will appear as one of the faceless terrorists. It is obvious that the Centre has decided to continue the rough and ready methods of a terror State. Such policies of despair have been tried here and found wanting; and there is no reason why Mr Ray will succeed where others have failed. Shorn of trappings, his assignment is quick rehabilitation of the new Congress so that the party may re-establish its hegemony in this truant State in the next election. He will forceclose the party's chances if he persists in the way he has set about this task.

State Finances

The Indian States have gained notoriety for developing the habit of living beyond their means. What is more, they care little to tap every possible source of revenue so that minimum deficits can be shown in their annual budgets. The fundamentals of budgeting have been thrown to the winds for all practical purposes. Perhaps there is a competition among the States for showing higher deficits; they know well how money is to be allocated but retreat when it comes to taxing the politically sensitive areas. Leaving aside the agricultural sector, the States' taxing authority is over a limited area. They have so far been able to pass on their burden to the Centre through the medium of the Reserve Bank. Facts are there to show that under the recommendations of the successive Finance Commissions States' share of Central taxes and grants has increased. Moreover, the fifth Finance Commission has enlarged the size of the divisible pool of income-tax by including therein advance tax collections and Central excise duties for 1972-74. But many States feel discriminated against in respect of special accommodation. It is very likely that as the Central Finance Ministry's reminders to the States to clear off their overdrafts have only resulted in gradual reduction in debts and book adjustments, so also the mild threat that special assistance will taper off in the future will fail to impose fiscal discipline on the States.

Mr Chavan said in his budget speech that while some fiscal measures were taken at the Centre matching steps could not be taken for the countryside because of constitutional limitations. Why on earth agricultural income should be exempt from taxation, particularly when big landowners with the assistance of financing agencies have been making rapid strides? The Centre's decision to impose a levy of 10 per cent ad valorem on tractors will not bring in revenue of more than Rs 3.40 crores

in the current year, but is to be welcomed if it presages imposts on other agricultural inputs. It should not prove difficult to devise ways of giving poor farmers necessary inputs at subsidised prices. While there is everything to be said in favour of a uniform basis of taxation of urban and rural income—many business enterprises are investing in a big way in farming to get tax exemption—it is unlikely the States will ever properly mobilise resources from rural areas. While the reason is obviously political, State authorities unashamedly point to administrative difficulties in collecting income-tax from the countryside.

No Combat

It has been a bad year for Mr Nixon. He banked a lot on the performance of the South Vietnamese army in Southern Laos. As a hawkish correspondent commented just when the operation started with crack ARVN troops, it was a test of Vietnamisation. If the ARVN succeeded, the policy of U.S. withdrawal would be justified. If it failed, the Americans would have to realise that there was no alternative but to pack off. The operation, a resounding failure, would have turned into a total massacre of crack units of the ARVN but for massive air intervention. The campaign is said to have cost the U.S. \$3,500 million. In terms of morale, of both the ARVN and the American troops standing on the sidelines, the cost was incalculable. A stage has been reached in Vietnam where American ground troops would not fight. As a spokesman of the American Division, one of the two main combat formations remaining in Vietnam, says: "We do not go looking out for the Vietcong any more... The only time we make contact nowadays is when they accidentally run into us... If we are unlucky and we meet them, we do what we can to get away... We try and shy

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from them...The brass is always telling us to check out some enemy activity but we just lark around. I mean when we find a place we like to swim...we do not give a goddam about this war."

With such morale, matched by the defeatism in the ARVN, it will not be possible for Mr Nixon to hold on indefinitely and he will have to fall back on a strategy advocated years ago—that the task of fighting should be limited to logistical support and the airforce and the navy. But even that would not save the ARVN from disasters. They were kicked out a few days from Snoul in Cambodia where they had settled down. Occasional encounters with the Vietcong continue to prove how feeble the ARVN is. It cannot breathe without air support.

As for the continuance of air force units backed by a small ground force, the Vietcong will not accept it. Their latest offer is to release all prisoners of war if the Americans set a deadline for withdrawal by the end of this year. At the time the Vietcong are reported to have called on the people to mobilise for the October Presidential election. This election can be rigged, of course, and Thieu will not take any chances. But electioneering may help the moderates to organise themselves for the post-election task of weakening the puppet government. Fighting will go on, the target being the ARVN. Reluctant American troops will not be mauled but left to their marijuana and heroin.

Much more important than the fate of Thieu is the U.S. presidential election. Publication of the secret documents of the Pentagon has given a big boost to the American doves in the Senate, though the House of Representatives did not pass the Senate resolution on withdrawal. The Vietcong offer on war prisoners will put Mr Nixon in a tight corner, though he, like his predecessors, knows how to trick the public. But as the saying goes, one cannot fool all the people all the time, particularly the young.

At least apparently the OAU has weathered the storm but not without scars. It has been keeping its show of unity precariously for the past few years. But this time, under the hot tropical sun of Addis Ababa, the dissensions have shown their ugly face threatening to split the organisation vertically down the middle. Everything in fact went awry with the OAU this year. Even after the patch-up of the vexatious question of a last-minute change of venue, only 10 out of the 41 heads of State could find time to come to Addis Ababa and the rest only sent their second-rung diplomats. Meeting for an unusually short period, the summiters worked out and accepted resolutions and hurriedly parted company lest any disagreement spoiled the game. And the freedom fighters who thronged there hopefully left the place empty-handed and disgruntled.

Despite the promptness with which the OAU disposed of its business and its tall resolutions, it could not keep off disaffection among its members on such fundamental problems as talks with South Africa. Though the Ivory Coast's Houphouet-Boigny has desisted from an open espousal of the racists, he is still considering the idea. Personally he chose to stay out of the conference. But his emissary proposed to discuss the problems of 'peace and neutrality' in Africa, that is, for rejection of force to solve apartheid and acceptance of the neutrality of African regimes, South Africa inclusive, to ensure the peace. No doubt Houphouet-Boigny's

absence made his subtleties rather ineffective but his stock is not yet low. As the final count shows, only 28 out of 39 States—Central African Republic and Uganda boycotting—voted for the declaration that there is no basis for such talks; six stood against it and five refused to take sides. The voting took its expected form. Only Ghana's Busia fell out of the backers of "dialogue" perhaps to mend his fences.

It is only on questions of its stand against the outsiders in Africa that the OAU could promote unity. Though there is no divergence of opinion on it, the OAU's activity however, has remained confined to showing the mailed fist but little action on this score apart from a trickle of aid to organisations like PAC and MPLA from time to time. Even Mr Gowon of Nigeria found reasons to criticise the whimpering OAU about its non-activity. He said that the time had come "to liberate at least one colonial territory within the next three years". But in spite of this the OAU liberation committee could not adopt a programme and ended with a tame proposal to enquire into the matter.

Though the compromise has saved the OAU so far and enabled it to waver between states of diverse hues, the political situation in Africa is taking new dimensions. Class antagonisms are showing their fangs; racial hatred is mounting but the possibility of a take-over by the militants in different regions is potentially more dangerous to most of the leaders.

Death In The Air

A correspondent writes :

One may be sceptical about space explorations when one thinks of the tremendous cost of it all and when one sees people dying of disease and starvation in large parts of the world. But science goes on and in course of

time even the most exotic experiment brings some startling changes in the way of living of the affluent nations. The have-nots, who get the end-product much later, get more envious, but let's face the fact: if all the money spent on space explorations

were diverted to developing countries controlled by corrupt and rapacious banias, there would be no miracle. And why should one people pay for the uplift of another? Besides, the security of the Big Powers requires space satellites and all the other paraphernalia of death.

The Russians have made great strides in unmanned space flights. The Americans are not lagging behind, to say the least. And joint efforts, on which the space scientists of both the countries deliberated at Houston, may lead to spectacular breakthroughs—and remind the Chinese that containment is growing. However, people are no longer enthralled when something or the other goes up or comes down with valuable data like moon-dust, of which they can make little sense. But even to them the sudden and tragic death of the three Russian cosmonauts came as a great shock. They had done a splendid job during their 23-day journey through the void. It was another reminder that a space flight could not be taken for granted as something like a trip in a plane. It was not just 200 kilometres that lay between Dobrovolsky, Volkov and Patsayev and earth, but millions of years of evolution through which man adapted himself to life on this planet, to gravitation. But the irony of the human situation is that the three Russians who died would be remembered longer as individuals than if they had succeeded.

Naked Terror

A correspondent writes:

We have received yet another report of cold-blooded murder by the police. Parts of the report are unconfirmed, but they fit perfectly into the general pattern of deliberate police killing which may soon engulf the CPM also.

On the night of Thursday, June 24 the police entered a house in Taltola, forced their way into an inner apartment and came upon 3 allegedly Na-

xalite youths who were sleeping there. According to the people of the neighbourhood, the officer asked another member of the raiding party, presumably a spy, "Isn't this Biplab Bhattacharya?" The spy replied, "yes." Biplab was immediately shot dead and the other two were taken into custody. Two days later the papers published a police version of the incident which said that Biplab Bhattacharya was killed when the police were obliged to fire to defend themselves against a bomb attack.

The next day, the hartal day, at about 3 p.m., the East Calcutta Police, completely bypassing the Nadia District Police, came to Kalyani in five Ambassador cars and raided a house in the university staff quarters area. From the account we got from the Kalyani University staff and from certain people in Beliaghata and Narkeldanga, it would appear that about 9 people, including a woman, were rounded up from the house at Kalyani.

To the best of our information, the house in question belongs to a university lecturer who is away in America. It had been turned, obviously with his or the caretaker's consent, into a sort of bachelors' mess where some of the 'daily passengers' among the lecturers and scholars ate and slept casually. Of the arrested one was a research scholar attached to the Maths Department who used to live there occasionally. Another was a lecturer in physics who was only a casual visitor and who, we learnt, was widely admired and respected. Both had decided left sympathies, but neither was ever found associating with political activists of any colour. Another was a university student. They have been refused bail and kept in the Beliaghata police lock-up where at least two of them have been subjected to ruthless torture.

The police are supposed to have arrested five others from the same place—four young men and a woman—all of whom, according to the police, were seasoned Naxalites. It is significant that the police caught them on the day following the night on

which they had with cool purpose shot Biplab Bhattacharya. Maybe, it was the same spy who guided them to both places. The police kept these five young people in custody for a couple of days, inflicting every possible torture on them, and then, putting the girl away, allegedly shot them dead with cool deliberation and removed all traces of the murders by burning up the bodies. From what we could gather from sundry folk in Beliaghata and Kalyani, one of these youths murdered by the police was called Kajal, another was Nityagopal, while a third was some Kar. It is widely rumoured in Beliaghata that when the parents of one of these supposedly murdered youths went to the Beliaghata P.S. to make enquiries about their son, they were told that their son had been shot and his body already burned.

A murder is a murder when it is committed by Naxalite or CPM cadres or by any unprivileged individual. But the police are given a free hand to murder just whomever they might like to do away with. The law is there to restrain private individuals and of course all left radicals, but the police can break the law just when and where and how they jolly well like. The police, operating like trained bloodhounds, are placed above the law. This is the very essence of fascism.

All this is in accordance with the laws of history. When a bourgeois regime run in the interest of corrupt, blood-sucking profiteers and black-marketeters and ministers and bureaucrats loses political and economic control—as it is bound to do sooner or later—and is faced with the prospect of extinction, it starts shedding its democratic disguise and shows itself up for what it is—a rapacious, ravenous wolf. The police and the military in a reactionary State represent the fangs and claws of their bourgeois rulers, and the exposure of their wolfish image is in direct proportion to the explosion of the democratic myth. Police terror is most brutal in West Bengal because

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it is here that the myth has come to wear thinnest.

But the brutality of bourgeois terror itself is acting as an added stimulus to action. Some Naxalite theoreticians claim that they are resorting to frequent assassinations largely to destroy the inert, congealed fear of authority that has been lying like a dead load on the Indian soul. In a sense, the police, though acting out of totally opposite motives, are, strangely enough, contributing to the same effect—that of killing fear. As terror proceeds it tends to turn stale and goes on losing its edge until it is hardly terror at all. If this were not true, how is it that Naxalbari was succeeded by Srikakulam, Srikakulam by Mushahari and Debra-Gopiballapur, they in turn by the struggle

and repression in Calcutta and the urban areas? The police terror, most people thought, would have a crushing effect on Naxalism. But this expectation again has been rudely shattered. For all press agencies report a resurgence of Naxalite activity—more organised than ever—in the hitherto quiet district of Birbhum, while rumour points to a significant upswing of Naxalite combat power in the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa border areas.

Is it another of the laws of history that the police and their bourgeois masters, pitifully blind to the deep-rooted causes behind violent political unrest, must go on persisting in the folly of sticking to inhuman terror as the sovereign remedy for massive human discontentment?

View from Delhi

No-Options At All

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

ALL that Mrs Gandhi's Government seems to be left with is the mythical, massive mandate of the elections and tonnes of self-pity over Bangladesh. In retrospect, it would appear to have surrendered all its options to the super-powers, waiting hopefully for a pre-fabricated solution. The super-powers were expected to use the aid lever to force a political settlement of the kind acceptable to India. The super-powers have either been naive or deceitful, judging by the nature of General Yahya Khan's proposals. New Delhi still seems to hope that the Soviet Union can pull off something dramatic in the next few days.

One has been hearing a great deal about unilateral action by India and the like. Mrs Gandhi autosuggestively declared that India could act on her own but has been cautioning against bellicose talk of war and such adventurism. There are only non-options for India within the frame-

work of the big non-option, i.e. the refugees. If India did not have the burden of refugees, the Bangladesh struggle could have gone on and on and New Delhi would have been left with the limited problem of containing the extremist activity in West Bengal with the Officer on Special Duty, Mr Siddhartha Sankar Ray, directing the operations.

The non-options widely discussed at the moment are: a naval blockade of East Bengal; liberation of a part of East Bengal to resettle the refugees; assistance to Bangladesh fighters to win the struggle. Mrs Gandhi neither confirmed nor denied that the Government was considering these options but she rhetorically asked the interviewer if a naval blockade would not amount to war. Any attempt to liberate any part of East Bengal would also amount to that. In the long run, assistance to Bangladesh fighters would also lead to war, declared or undeclared. Thus

it is a compulsive drift towards a confrontation.

No Indo-Pakistani military conflict can end decisively. The super-powers would not take more than seven days to intervene and force a return to the status quo. Thus any escalation would be a futile exercise for both India and Pakistan. Neither of the two countries want a war; nor can they afford one. Neither of the super-powers want a conflict on the sub-continent. So any escalation would be an absurdly short-lived affair. Persistent U.S. arms shipments to Pakistan are perhaps meant to serve notice on India that in the event of an armed conflict, there would be SEATO and CENTO intervention this time. The Soviet attitude to the issue suggests that India will not get Soviet support if there is a conflict and at best the Soviet Union would be neutral and play the role of an honest broker, arranging another Tashkent if necessary.

Rebuff at Damascus

The rebuff India got at the Afro-Asian solidarity outfit's Damascus show is a pointer to the changed Soviet attitude. Soviet stakes in the Middle East are high and Pakistan's proximity to the Middle East makes it a worthwhile ally. India's stance at Damascus was in the least ludicrous. But this is part of a pattern. Shortly after the 1962 Sino-Indian border war, New Delhi discovered the utility of the pro-Moscow front organisations and Government-financed delegations were sent to conferences from Moshi to Djakarta to "confront" China at the Soviet instance. The Afro-Asian front organisations became government agencies overnight and the CPI racketeers who ran them became respectable in official circles immediately. The debacle at Damascus should remind one of the Indian clowns at Moshi.

This might well be the beginning of a change in India's policy towards the Arab world, if the lessons of Damascus are learnt seriously in the South-Block. But then Soviet pressure is a factor one cannot overlook, as long as there is a powerful and

affluent Moscow lobby in New Delhi.

It is an uneasy lull here. Observers talk apprehensively of a conflict. When and how long? You can blame the monsoon for the tortuous delay. The foreign policy is in the doldrums. "We have no friends left", everybody says parrot-like. The Defence Ministry's annual report still talks about the twin threats from China and Pakistan determining our defence priorities. Well, one is tired of the talk since 1962—the confident predictions of a joint Sino-Pak push every winter and the threat is postponed to summer. One hears the same talk for the eighth or the ninth year in succession. Nothing changes in New Delhi. The bogeyman prevails over every one else.

The powers with which the Centre is arming itself is nobody's business. When the Chief Ministers opposed the scrapping of the national emergency some four years ago, the Union

Home Ministry made a study and found that the States had quietly armed themselves with such sweeping powers that the Defence of India Act was redundant in many respects. Since then, the Centre has armed itself with the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act which applies at present only to organisations advocating secession. The Mizo National Front and the Plebiscite Front in Kashmir have been the targets so far. It would not be difficult for Mrs Gandhi to raise the Naxalite bogey now and amend the Act to cover political organisations. And now the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, which goes beyond the Defence of India Act and the Preventive Detention Act in scope, all to maintain law and order in the country. The emergency situation in 1962 resulted in a severe abridgement of fundamental rights, the wails of a few bourgeois liberals notwithstanding. It is

the same position now. The threat to national security, real or imaginary, is supposed to be enough justification for any measure and there is a way of rationalising everything. Mr Siddhartha Sankar Ray holds an extra-constitutional position, functioning as a super-governor. The report in a Calcutta daily that General P. P. Kumaramangalam is to be appointed special security adviser to all the four Governors of the eastern States was contradicted by an official spokesman. The contradiction carries little conviction with those who know of the plan that is in the offing. It amounts to telling West Bengal in so many words that it is unfit for parliamentary democracy and in any case, there is no time for an academic debate on the issue and it has to be ruled by the Centre. If need be, the whole of eastern India. Did any one say the east is red?

July 4, 1971

The Two Bengals

SUMANTA BANERJEE

Events in the two Bengals once again prove the advantages of a parliamentary democracy over military dictatorship for a mature bourgeoisie.

The objective which Yahya Khan wants to achieve through brutal and blatant suppression in the framework of racialism, Mrs Gandhi seeks to gain by a sophisticated combination of cajolery and repression sanctioned by Parliament. In both the Bengals, political stirrings reached a stage where the status quo was threatened. In East Bengal, the movement was primarily nationalistic, led by a rising middle class against the cultural and economic domination of West Pakistan. In West Bengal it was on a different level. The Ruling Congress till the 1971 elections had been losing ground in West Bengal. After the experience of the 1967 and 1969 United Front governments, the Leftist movement had reached a

crossroads, veering between the obligation to work according to a moth-eaten Constitution blocking its way to radical reforms and the need to work outside the Constitution and prepare for armed struggle.

The existence of a Constitution, a Parliament at the Centre and a legislature in the State and a sacrosanct garb clothing them succeeded in dividing the Left in West Bengal. While some sections were lulled into the belief that negotiations and constitutional reforms would lead to socialism, others like the CPI(M) doubted the wisdom of such a policy but could not or would not opt for a more radical policy, and a few other groups notably the CPI(ML) left the mainstream of constitutionalism and chose the path of underground preparations for guerrilla warfare.

In East Bengal on the other hand, a clear-cut military dictatorship pursuing an unabashed policy of exploi-

tation without any pretension to democracy succeeded in uniting the majority of the people behind the slogan of autonomy. The military atrocities with the aim of genocide unleashed in East Bengal today have left the political elements there with no other option but armed struggle. Compared to the situation in West Bengal, it has therefore been much easier for the East Bengal people to choose the path of armed struggle.

In West Bengal, the Centre followed a policy of selective isolation of a section of the Leftist movement, namely the CPI(M) and CPI(ML) from the rest, by branding them "anti-national elements," "subversive forces" and anti-constitutionalists" among other things. Yahya Khan's radio broadcast of March 26, after the army crackdown in East Bengal, expresses curiously similar sentiments regarding the Bengali political leaders there. He describes the

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non-cooperation movement as "an act of treason." He accuses the Awami League workers of defiling the photograph of "the father of the nation," and of creating "turmoil, terror, insecurity and a number of murders." Are not these words reminiscent of Mr Nehru's speeches before ousting the first Communist Ministry in Kerala or of Chavan's numerous utterances against the United Front ministries in West Bengal?

But as stated earlier, the Leftist movement in West Bengal was hopelessly divided. The arrogant, big-brother attitude of the CPI(M) during the U.F. regime and the indiscriminate terrorism of the CPI(ML) on the one hand and the policy of capitulation and collaboration of the CPI the other, helped the Centre to isolate the middle-class population of Calcutta and turn them away from the Communists in the 1971 elections.

A brief review of the present situation in West Bengal would reveal that the Centre is pursuing a policy of emasculating the militant section of the Leftist movement. Through military combing operations in urban and rural areas, the people, particularly the peasants in the countryside, are being disarmed of even the most primitive weapons of resistance like ramdao or axes. The Centre is trying to avoid a situation where it might have to fight with an armed population, as is happening in East Bengal today. The youth wing of the Congress(R) is emerging as a paramilitary organization like the Nazi storm troopers, and would be utilized at the appropriate time to carry out unofficially the dirty job of lynching the Communists. No one would be able to accuse the Centre then of using the military against political workers, as is happening in East Bengal. The Indian Government's added advantage lies in the legislative sanction obtained now for preventive detention which has empowered it with the right of indiscriminate arrests of activists of the militant Leftist parties. Thus, a virtual military rule in West Bengal will masquerade as President's rule.

The CPI(M) appears to be a helpless spectator to these events. Without any appropriate underground organisation or preparations for armed struggle, it appears to have been caught unawares by the subtle manoeuvres of Mrs Gandhi. Isolated from the other Leftist parties, it is unable to launch a united movement against the present Central policy towards West Bengal. If this drift continues, a second Indonesia will be re-enacted in West Bengal, with the only difference that the military coup will have the blessings of Parliament and a massacre can be avoided by preventive detention and selective assassination of party activists.

Thus, by following a calculated strategy and being well-prepared in advance, Mrs Gandhi hopes to forestall the mess that Yahya Khan has got himself into in East Bengal.

The influx of refugees from East Bengal has posed a new situation. In the absence of a Leftist leadership, the influx may as well lead to communal tensions in some areas. Stray incidents have already taken place in the border areas. A communal riot at this stage might come in handy for the Centre to bring the military directly into the scene.

From all indications, the period of parliamentary struggles seems to be coming to an end in West Bengal. No elections would lead to a stable government. The CPI(M) is in command of a relatively well organized mass movement. Will it allow its cadres to be eliminated? It is as yet undecided over the next phase of the struggle. Will it be a combination of parliamentary struggle and underground preparations for insurrection? A complete departure from constitutional movements will involve a change of strategy, tactics, propaganda, organisational machinery and so on, for which the CPI(M) is not yet prepared.

The only armed underground Leftist force in West Bengal are the Naxalites. They had the foresight to realize as early as 1967 the inevitability of armed struggles and started preparing for guerilla warfare.

But it is to be seen how well prepared they are to survive a direct military take over. It is one thing to finish off political rivals or a lonely policeman in a desolate corner or among a crowd of unarmed terrorized spectators, and quite another to withstand military operations, the like of which we are witnessing in East Bengal.

Judging from their statements, the CPI(ML) leadership hopes to combine the struggles in East and West Bengal. By "struggles," they mean the nascent peasant movement in East Bengal and not the present "liberation movement." A clandestinely published copy of *Deshabrat* of March 20 said: "...in East Bengal too, under the leadership of the Marxist-Leninist Communist party, armed peasant struggle has begun in the countryside and the possibility of the unity of two Bengals has arisen. To retard its progress, Mujibur and his Awami League have taken the path of uniting the two Bengals in an imperialist way and in imperialist interests."

Leaving aside the merits or demerits of such an assessment, one must concede however that the CPI(ML) has been generally right in its reading of the situation in West Bengal. Its aim was to reduce parliamentary democracy to a farce and render it unworkable. It has succeeded in doing it in West Bengal. It sought to bring the repressive machinery of the State to the forefront. The gradual de-democratization of the system in West Bengal and the possibility of virtual military rule in the State have combined to create exactly the situation which the CPI(ML) has been wanting. Combating the idea that the struggle in India would be a short one, the CPI(ML) has been consistently preaching the theory of a protracted war continuing for decades. From the recent experience in East Bengal and an inkling of the shape of things to come in West Bengal, it appears that this region of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent is destined for a slow grinding process of armed struggle.

Another Report On Birbhum

A. B.

THE Suri morgue now is one of the busiest of the district morgues in West Bengal. The attendant there is a busy and a happy man since most of the bodies brought there mean some 'fee' for his professional skill. He has never had it so good.

Most of his wares belong to the so-called village gentry, some of whom have the additional brand of moneylender. The relations of the victims invariably want quick disposal from the morgue and do not mind a tanner for the attendant. He boastfully claims that Rs 50 a day is his average earning now.

He, unfortunately, is not uniformly lucky. The peon, the carpenter and some others of that sort who came there—not by themselves but on bamboo poles—were unable to oblige him. That, of course, is part of the game and has to be accepted with composure.

Now why is the Suri morgue so busy these days? The walls claim that this is due to the activities of the CPI (ML) while a Congress leader claims them to be CPM work. The guerillas of the CPI (ML), the walls claim, are annihilating the class enemies systematically and that keeps the morgue so busy. The victims were in fact already stinking living corpses and by killing them, the guerillas were performing a duty to society.

Before we go further, it is necessary to set out the broad scene in the district of Birbhum. It is predominantly rural where as much as 92% of the population live in villages and as much as 95% directly depend on agriculture. There is practically no industry though 70 odd rice mills employ about 5,000 men. Unemployment is rampant and the under-employed consider themselves fortunate. Poverty is extensive as in many other districts but there was hardly any articulation. Barring a few pockets,

orthodox left political parties have had no real base. Exploitation of the poor was an art practised by the better-off-ones without exception and the victims merely cursed their luck. Though big jotedars are few, medium jotedars are many and they are more or less self-supporting, thanks largely to the Mayurakshi project. Both the big and medium jotedars are exploiters of sorts and extract interest at crushing rates from the bargadars and kisans against crop loans usually advanced during the lean months. Usurious practices and pawn taking are quite common. There is hardly any village without a few jotedar-cum-pawnbrokers. There are many other types of exploitation including deprivation of rights to land and of share of grains, and free and forced labour. Thus Birbhum has been a picture of undiluted feudal oppression and exploitation.

The situation in the district was such as to attract serious attention of leftist parties and of them, the CPM and the SUC made serious attempts to organise the 'have-nots'. That they were successful only in pockets was largely due to the generally apathetic attitude of the have-nots and partly to their own organisational shortcomings. It is unfortunate that the district has hardly witnessed any militant peasant movement during the last 50 years. This is not merely because of the absence of a militant political party but also because of the general apathy to revolt. There is therefore a political vacuum amongst the poor peasantry, by far the most numerous single section of the population in the district.

It is in this setting that the CPI (ML) decided to intervene in this district. Initially, they secured their sympathisers amongst college students followed by students in the upper classes of the schools. The first wall slogans started appearing at Suri, Rampurhat and other urban centres around May-June, 1970. Gutting of schools and then of offices began in October-November. By February 1971, there was hardly any school in the urban centres that did not have the privilege of being burnt. Quite a few schools in the rural areas

were also burnt. Activists in most cases were, however, still confined to towns.

'Class Enemy'

It was in December that the first murder of a 'class enemy' took place at Suri; the victim was a college student owing allegiance to another political organisation. Interestingly, the murder took place as a sequel to inter-club rivalry. The victim in his dying declaration named, amongst others, the son of the most important moneylender-cum-pawnbroker of Suri. The accused, understandably, went underground.

This murder was the green signal to the new phase and the process has continued without stop.

Elections were impending. The CPI (ML) urged people, often with threat of death, to boycott the poll. Other political parties were not idle and started preparing for elections. A large number of posters put up by the CPI (ML) and written in red ink were on the reverse white side of Congress posters. How they came by these Congress posters was a mystery. Everybody carefully avoided the posters of the CPI (ML) but there were a few cases where Congress posters were pasted over them. Normally this would not have been possible unless of course the same set of people were putting up both types of posters.

Sometime around February, the CPI (ML) activists took upon the task of building their armoury by snatching guns. Initially some police guns were snatched. It was therefore widely believed that a very large number of guns would be snatched from the polling booths during the elections as all the booths had two guns. But barring one case at Rampurhat, no guns were taken during the elections.

Gun snatching became a daily occurrence from April onwards. Guns were no longer to be snatched for they were now available merely for the asking from private licensees. Guns taken away total over 200 of which about 20 are claimed by the authorities to have been recovered. The administration sensing the potential

danger involved in taking away of guns from private licensees in particular, asked for the guns to be deposited with thanas. This was done promptly in the affected areas. Thus a large area was denuded of private arms.

The situation stimulated two sets of results. The Naxalites mounted their offensive against class enemies with great vigour. Isolated cases of murder were continuing right from December but the total number in any month up to April did not even reach double figures. May and June, however, have seen over 50 murders each month and during the week ending June 21, as many as 28 murders took place. Most of these were attributed to the Naxalites and claimed by wallings to be their job. Of about 175 murdered so far, 5 are policemen, 27 are big jotedars or their family members (having 25 acres or more either in their names and/or others), 32 medium jotedars or their family members (having between 10 and 25 acres), 26 small jotedars or their family members (less than 10 acres), 12 usurers, 11 dacoits (10 of whom were killed by village resistance groups and the other by the Naxalites), 7 police agents, and the rest of unclassified categories. Amongst unclassified categories are a few landless labourers and three government servants.

The second result has been large-scale looting and arson by various gangs of really anti-social elements in the countryside denuded of private arms. This has created a serious state of panic. Evacuation of some well-to-do village gentry to towns even in other districts has been reported. There is general demoralisation in the countryside which was so long confined only to towns. Some village gentry claim to have entered into understanding with these elements and are paying protection money.

What is the role of the administration in this situation? The top echelons of the district administration arranged for their own security and stopped moving except with armed guards. It is also said that they remain in a state of stupor after dusk with the help of a few pegs. Never-

theless, the first few murders received some attention from the police. At least in 4 cases, police dogs were employed. Necessarily, a few suspects were arrested but what happened to them is known to none. With the steep increase in murders, arson and dacoity, even the semblance of police investigation has ceased. Gun snatching, however, stimulated different reactions. Large areas were cordoned off with military assistance and scores of 'suspects' detained for interrogation. Most of them were of course released after they paid their 'release fee' running very often into four figures. Harassment of the general public knew no bounds. There were merciless beatings resulting often in hospitalisation, detention under the PVA Act and application of other draconian laws. Significantly however, no 'encounter' was simulated even though at Rampurhat, 5 suspects with blood-stained clothes and with 3 rifles snatched from policemen after murdering one of them a little while ago, were found and arrested. Apparently, 'instructions' of the Home Department had not gone home everywhere.

The murder of a few usurers brought into force another phenomenon. Moneylenders of Birbhum are mostly pawnbrokers also. In Bolpur, Suri and other places pawned articles were returned to their owners without any payment, either of principal or interest. In most cases, the owners of the articles came en masse under the leadership of some local ML activists and accepted the articles.

Wine and liquor shops have been closed at Suri, Bolpur, Rampurhat after attacks on them. That does not of course mean that drinking has stopped or for that matter decreased. It has merely greatly encouraged indigenous distillation.

'Paper Tiger'

How have all these affected the general public? The murders coupled with the inability of the administration to stop them have completely shaken the confidence of the propertied class in particular and people in general. No murder has been fully

investigated. The Naxalites have definitely exposed that at least the present civil administration is a paper tiger. While the rationale behind a large number of annihilations was appreciated by the poorer section of the people, some murders, particularly those of a few landless labourers, one office peon and a carpenter, have created panic amongst them. No serious attempt has been made to explain these actions and only half-hearted efforts to project these targets as class enemies were made. It is now difficult to find anyone on the streets after dusk. Everybody wants to keep indoors. The desolation of midnight descends in the evening at places like Suri, Rampurhat and Bolpur. The picture in the villages is not different.

Annihilation of some of the dubious class enemies has also raised questions as to why many others eminently meriting annihilation have not even been touched. A good number of businessmen who actually control the business in the district are cited as cases in point. Rumours of protection money are often heard and no serious effort has been made to refute them.

Return of pawned articles by the usurious pawnbrokers has created mixed feelings. Some are happy that they have got back their articles while others look with foreboding to the future. Who will lend them money when they need it even if they want to pawn their articles? Their want being perpetual, they will often need money. Incidentally, when the most usurious moneylenders of Suri fled with all the articles in his custody in two trucks no one intercepted him. Some of his victims point out in anguish that this was possible because one of his sons is an important Naxalite.

Payments of a monthly levy to the ML activists are fairly common. At least in one case, refusal to pay was countered with physical violence. This has created both resentment, often inarticulate, and submission to the demand of levy.

A word about the composition of the ML activists. Most of them are in their teens, many in fact in their early teens. A very high percentage

of them also belong to urban centres. Highly mobile and swift, their actions bear the stamp of meticulous planning and perfect training. Politics, unfortunately, is not one of their strong points and serious, critical discussion with them is often dangerous. One thing which merits mention is that very few of the urban and rural poor have cared to join their ranks as activists. The 'have-nots' have

largely ignored their call to join their ranks. The communication gap between the ML on the one hand and the general public on the other is great inasmuch as most annihilations remain unexplained until some wall-writings appear.

Annihilation of class enemies, intimidation of usurious pawnbrokers and compulsive parting with, with their wares, demoralisation of the admini-

stration and the propertied class: in these the Naxalites have been successful to a large extent. But whether those alone will succeed in breaking the production relation in the district and help to liquidate the rural debt, estimated at about Rs 30 crores, is of course, another matter on which no questions are asked or replies expected.

June 29, 1971

The Guerillas Of Latin America—II

LAJPAT RAI

LIKE in Guatemala, in Venezuela too, it was an unsuccessful military revolt that brought nationalist officers into the ranks of the guerillas. But whereas in Guatemala the CIA intervention in 1954 had cleared the way for a series of military dictators of the most rabid type, in Venezuela the focal point of the political movement was reached with the overthrow of dictator Perez Jimenez in early 1958. But instead of ushering in a new progressive era in the history of the country, the revolution that ousted Perez Jimenez fell into the grasping hands of Romulo Batencourt (a one-time leftist* who came to power on a progressive platform and ended by proving the worst enemy of the Venezuelan people) and was completely aborted. The Venezuelan guerillas derived support largely from those who had pinned their hopes on the 1958 revolution and subsequently felt betrayed by the reactionary line pursued by Romulo Batencourt's party *Acceon Democratica*. One important section of such people was the students of Caracas University organized in Frente Universitario (university front) led by Americo Martin. The front of university students had close ties with radical youth organizations who had

*Batencourt wrote a strong indictment of the U.S. exploitation of Venezuelan oil. The book was later withdrawn from circulation.

also played an important role in the movement to overthrow the dictator Perez Jimenez under the guidance of a brilliant young journalist Ojeda who was later to become an outstanding guerilla leader. The third component of the guerilla movement in Venezuela was the Communist Party of Venezuela (CPV) which had organized its military apparatus as far back 1957 and had nominated some leading members of the Central Committee to expand it. Douglas Bravo and Luben Petkoff, the two leading guerilla leaders, now expelled from the Party, were designated for this task.

Another important stream which contributed to the ranks of guerillas was the MIR, a section of the *Acceon Democratica*—young people who broke with the parent body led by oldtimers Romulo Batencourt and Raul Leoni.

Soon after his election in February 1959 Batencourt began to show that he was second to no military dictator in his ability to smash political opponents. His post-election message to the country was practically a declaration of war on the people. His activities became more and more violent every week that passed¹. On August 4, 1959, in Caracas a demonstration by 50,000 unemployed was fired upon, killing 17 workers making

¹ Mario Menendez Rodriguez, *Venezuela Empuna las Armas* (Venezuela Takes Up Arms) 1960, p. 71.

peaceful claims. In November a student demonstration was charged by cavalry, killing two and wounding many more.

By this time the Cuban Revolution had cast its spell on the leaders of the democratic and revolutionary movement in Venezuela and the people looked to it for inspiration and assistance. Students, youth, workers and the leaders of the MIR were profoundly influenced by it. In an interview the MIR leader Moses Molero said:

"We saw that while our leaders had been talking about revolution for thirty years, in Cuba revolution triumphed in two years of fighting: while Romulo Batencourt had been talking about agrarian reforms for thirty years and did nothing about it, in Cuba a far-reaching agrarian reform was taking place; while our leaders had been talking about struggle against imperialism for thirty years, and while each time they came to power they avoided the subject like cowards, in Cuba they were resolutely confronting Yankee imperialist pressure"²

The year 1962 produced in Venezuela the first outbreaks of guerilla warfare. On February 2, 1962 near Santa Cruz in Falcon state a jeep carrying military supplies was captured. On the same day a mili-

² Augusto Velardo, *Entrevista Con Moses Molero Por Que?* May 1968

tary truck carrying soldiers and equipment was seized. On March 5 and 15 two more clashes took place in the state of El Charal in which a guerilla and four soldiers were killed. The guerilla movement spread to five states. On September 7, the Caracas Press carried the news of disappearance of Ojeda who had resigned his seat in the Venezuelan Congress and joined the guerillas. Soon after he was captured and sentenced to 18 years imprisonment. In 1963 in a "Letter from Prison" Ojeda made the following statement: "The armed struggle in our chosen path is the result of objective, clear and precise conditions prevailing in our country. Our people have been left with no alternative but violence. Our armed guerilla movement is not, as many pretend, a problem inspired by communists nor is it the importation of Cuban revolution into our country. It is a fight to the finish against the local oligarchy buttressed by American imperialism which controls and exploits the main sources of wealth and which by means of economic domination prevents the putting into practice a policy in accordance with the desires and feelings of the people"³

Towards the end of 1962, however, after a majority of the guerilla fronts had been severely beaten, two or three of them began to regroup and gradually to acquire permanence. Late in 1962 some groups merged to form a National Liberation Army. This consisted of groups from Communist, MIR and URD parties as well as progressive-minded members of the armed forces who joined them after their unsuccessful revolts during 1961-1962 which were crushed with an iron hand. On February 10, 1963 after a conference of various groups in Caracas the front was given the name of FALN—*Fuerza Armada de Liberacion Nacional (Armed Forces of National Liberation)*.

The Venezuelan Communist Party only agreed to join the FALN on

³ La Carta al Prisionero, *La Gazeta*, August 17, 1963

condition that a political counterpart of it known by the name of National Liberation Front be set up. This body (FLN) was to be responsible for political decisions that would affect the guerilla movement in the sphere of tactics as well as general strategy. The CPV leadership hoped to control the activities of the FALN through the FLN which they dominated from the beginning. Although the party was later to adopt a position of complete hostility to guerilla movements, at this stage it was wholeheartedly in favour. Political guerillas were given training in Cuba, China and even in the Soviet Union. Revolution was just round the corner.

Sabotage

In spite of setbacks in 1962, FALN groups were reasonably active. Special emphasis was placed on sabotaging American installations. As a reprisal for American pressure on Cuba during the missile crisis of October 1962, four power stations of the U.S. controlled Creole Petroleum Corporation (an offshoot of Standard Oil) were destroyed by saboteurs on October 27. A week later four pipelines belonging to Mobil Oil, Texas Oil and the Venezuelan subsidiary of Gulf Oil were blown up. In 1963, the guerillas set fire to the vast Sears Roebuck warehouse in Caracas and in June the offices of the United States Military Mission suffered the same fate. Guerilla activities in the countryside were also intensified and numerous small and big actions took place in Falcon and Miranda states. The Government intensified repression. Arrests, shootings, torture were employed on a large scale. In October, the Venezuelan Congress withdrew parliamentary immunity of members of the Communist Party and the MIR. Twenty-three Congressmen from these two groups were arrested, including some of the top Communist leaders.

The presidential election was scheduled to be held in December. Elections have become the greatest weakness of the Communists in our times, particularly of the Moscow-oriented

Communists. The FALN gave a call to boycott the election. In the FLN, the political front of the FALN dominated by the Communists, voices were raised supporting participation in the election. But in the end the call for boycott was upheld. The boycott failed. Raul Leoni, the Accion Democratica candidate, secured 32% of the votes polled and was declared elected. In his inaugural speech on March 11, 1964 he promised to remove all restrictions on the activities of the Communists and the MIR if they renounced violence. This was said in what Leoni called "the spirit of national reconciliation". The bait was thrown. The first to pick it up was the leadership of the MIR. In January 1964, a month after the election, the secretary of the MIR, Domingo Rangel, came out openly for peaceful struggle. "Experience had shown," he wrote, "that Venezuela was not ripe for armed struggle".

In February, Pompeyo Marquez was captured by the Venezuelan special police and imprisoned. Thereafter, Communists began to move gradually into a position of hostility towards the armed struggle. What had begun in 1964 as mere criticism of the policy of regarding the guerillas as the principal means of conducting the struggle against the regime was to become by 1967 outright opposition to the very idea of relying on them at all. In a message to the Venezuelan people (actually to the regime) the Central Committee of the CPV declared on May 4, 1964 that an "end to the fighting was negotiable" on the basis of "democratic peace". They began to curtail the guerilla actions of the groups directly under their control. In their message to the people of Venezuela the Central Committee declared:

"Since December there has been a pause in fighting which apparently our enemies have mistaken for a sign of weakness rather than a move de-

⁴Message of the Central Committee of the CP of Venezuela, May 1964, published in *Documentos Colectivos*, p 31

signed to show our feeling that peaceful channels are not finally closed"⁴ The message also stated the conditions under which guerilla struggle could be completely suspended. These were a general amnesty, restoration of legal rights to banned parties, reinstatement of military officers in the army, release of political prisoners etc. The Party had made its peace with the regime.

Douglas Bravo, a member of the politbureau and one of the commanders of the FALN, was the first to point his accusing finger at the "liquidationist leadership" of the CPV. Commenting bitterly he wrote, "The leaders of the Communist Party and the MIR were not in touch with what was going on in Venezuela. Being in prison, they gave more weight to their personal problems than to the political problems of the Venezuelan people. And we might say that the defeat of the guerilla movement which the government had been unable to obtain by military means was nearly brought about by the leadership (of CPV, with its policy of giving up."⁵ Bravo refused to take orders from the "party clique" and called for the "fusion of political and military leadership based in the foco fighting in the countryside".

By the time the 7th plenum of the CP Central Committee was held in April 1965, the Communists had finally persuaded themselves to give priority to legal opposition in preference to guerilla action. The document issued as a result of the deliberations at the plenum had a nine-point programme minus guerilla action. It gave a call to the party to retreat on the military front and recommended the suspension of armed action. "Till there was complete recovery and until there has been some progress in winning new sectors and regrouping of old forces, all operations by FALN should cease".⁶

⁴Statement of Douglas Bravo published in *Punto Final* No 15/2. January, 1968

⁵Ibid. Quoted by Douglas Bravo.

Soon after Douglas Bravo was expelled from the leading committees a violent slander campaign was started against him in the party press. They called him all sorts of names which included the suggestion that he was "an agent of imperialism".

Guillermo Garcia Ponce, a member of the CC of CPV, wrote to Ojeda informing him about the expulsion of Bravo from the party and stated: "And as we believe there can be no revolution in Venezuela without the Communist Party (sic) we are not going to tolerate any attempt to attack the party at whatever cost."⁷ In the meantime, faced with the betrayal of the Communist Party which went to the extent of withdrawing financial resources from the guerillas, the latter reorganised themselves under a unified politico-military general command, consisting of Ojeda, Martin and Douglas Bravo.

The treachery of the CPV came to the knowledge of the general public when the former clashed with Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist Party. *Granma* of May 30 carried a letter written to Castro by the unified command of FLN-FALN which referred to the CPV indirectly with the observation that "many are hesitating in the face of sacrifice and difficulties." The letter also mentioned that "conciliation with imperialism and ruling classes can only act as a brake on the popular struggle." This infuriated the leadership of the CPV, who circulated a reply accusing Fidel Castro of "interfering in the internal affairs of the CPV and of Venezuela". They called him "High Pasha of revolution and the revolutionary people of Latin America". This was presented and circulated by the CIA and Cuban emigre organisations all over Latin America. Castro made a public, frontal attack on the CPV leadership accusing them of "rank betrayal" of the revolutionaries in Venezuela. In his well-known March 13 speech he said, "Without any faith in arm-

⁷Quoted by Ojeda in his booklet "*Hacia el poder Revolucionario (Towards Revolutionary Power)*" p 23

ed guerilla struggle...these leaders (of CPV) wanted to use it for political manoeuvres, compromise, scheming... Now they would have an immediate attack and again, for opportunistic reasons, arrange a ceasefire... what is more, since they had absolute control over the finances, propaganda media and supplies... they used blackmail against guerillas... they cut back their supplies or sent them nothing at all when their orders were not heeded."⁸ Fidel declared that whoever is not a revolutionary cannot be called a Communist "and if those who call themselves Communist do not know how to fulfill their duty we will support those who—even though they do not call themselves Communists—behave like real Communists in struggle."⁹ From the platform of the OLAS Castro denounced the rightist leadership "of the CPV for having adopted a position which smacks of an enemy of the revolutionaries, an instrument of imperialism and the oligarchy."¹⁰

At the present moment the guerilla movement of Venezuela is in a state of decline. Castro has fallen out with his former protegee Douglas Bravo who, according to the Cubans, lives in Caracas in luxury. Generally speaking, the Cuban enthusiasm for guerilla movements in Latin America has waned since the death of Che Guevara and rapprochement with the Soviet leadership.

The Venezuelan guerillas have proved that prolonged existence on inhospitable mountains is perfectly possible. They are now in another period of regrouping and introspection. And as Luben Petkoff put it, "the hope that people put in our actions shall never be belied."

(To be concluded)

⁸Speech of March 13, 1967, on the 10th anniversary of the attack on the Presidential Palace, University of Havana. Supplement *Information from Cuba* p 27

⁹Ibid p 29

¹⁰Castro's closing speech at the First Conference of Latin American Solidarity, August 10, 1967.

The Darkest Hour

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

THE war is over; the eighteen-day war of Kurukshetra. It is the last evening of the war. The Kauravas have been defeated; King Duryodhana is writhing in agony with severed limbs. The blind patriarch Dhritarashtra is pining at his palace with his waiting wife, Gandhari. It is really the hour of doom. Abhinetri Sangha's recent production *Andhayug* (translated from Dharmavir Bharati's Hindi original) starts from this crucial moment and stretches up to Krishna's death at Pravastirtha. The author makes a cruel post-mortem of the decay that set in during this period, the darkest hour. The accepted notions of justice and righteousness are challenged, especially the Krishna ideal and this dear and revered God is shown as a cunning warmonger. In this respect, the play is a genuine modern interpretation of the past and the resemblances to our own age labouring under the constant threat of a nuclear global war are too many to be missed. The first part is an analysis of the point of view of the vanquished. Here we have Aswaththama, the rebel smarting under the falsehood by which his father is tricked into death; Sanjay, the disinterested observer whose objectivity is really a burden on his conscience and Yuyutsu, the lone Kaurava who has fought on the Pandava side, now reduced to a disillusioned devotee. Presiding over the trio is Vidura, the pacifist preacher, a prisoner of his own idealism, as much of a false prophet as many of his modern counterparts. The second part depicts the victors' agony when the Pandava triumph loses its grandeur in the unending deaths and pestilence stalking the royal palace. The dramatic climax is reached in the last act after the death of Krishna and the voice of the past transcends the barriers of time and hits right into our hearts with a grim sense of foreboding.

This production is a significant

breakthrough for Abhinetri Sangha which has so long been churning out some cheap and crude pieces of conventional theatre. But the old habits die hard and the director Ajitesh Banerjee with all his training in the new drama movement has failed to achieve a uniformity of style and almost all the players suffer from a terrible confusion between horseplay and creative stylisation. Only Soumitra Chatterjee recovers in the last act where we have a sustained evocation of Aswaththama's existentialist turmoil. The translation is a little stiff and stilted and the poetry of some passages lacks spontaneity. The lighting is shoddy and the sound-effects are ill-orchestrated and the monotonous off-stage commentary linking the different episodes strains. For an effect it never actually attains. And for God's sake, get rid of the calendar cut-out of Krishna with

flute and everything. Krishna of the Mahabharata is completely different from that appearing in the folk-songs.

Brecht Exhibition

The exhibition organised by *Sandhyaneerh* at the Academy of Fine Arts helped the theatre-lovers of Calcutta to have a glimpse into the working of Brechtian methods of production and the general set-up of the Berliner Ensemble. The photographs detailed the various work-phases during the productions and there were scene-illustrations from the production of *Paris Commune*, *Mother Courage*, *Galileo* and other important Brecht plays, capturing poignant moments of acting. Unforgettable among these were the photographs of Helene Weigel as Mother Courage, emitting a "silent cry" after the killing of her son.

More On Tagore Recordings

H. CHAKRABORTY

FEW people could foresee the enormous impact Thomas Alva Edison's invention of the phonograph machine in 1877 would have on Indian music in general and Tagore music in particular. Tagore was then only sixteen, engrossed in shaping and reshaping his romantic lyrics such as *Shayana gagane ghora ghana-ghata*. Further interesting material has come to our hand which definitely proves that cylindrical wax recording of Indian music (Tagore music included) was started in Calcutta by Mr H. Bose late in 1898 by a phonograph machine used by Edison himself from 1888 to 1898 and bearing his signature. The disc record was introduced by Geisberg of Berlin who came down to India and recorded in 1902 the songs of many artistes of that time including the great Gaharjan who is yet to be surpassed as a *kheyalist*. These single-sided records were commercially released in India and sold like hot cakes. This tech-

nique was taken up by the Pathephone Co of France with whom Mr H. Bose came to a commercial arrangement for transferring his cylinders into discs better known as Bose-Pathe 11" single-sided disc records. The catalogue of songs recorded in this series issued from the Talking Machine Hall of Calcutta in 1906 listed 18 songs sung by Tagore bearing the serial nos. 351-368.

Double-sided disc recording was introduced by the International Talking Machine Co. of Germany in 1904 under the trade mark label Odeon which recorded many Tagore songs, printed them in Germany and released them commercially in India. *Sarthaka janama amar* by Mr S. B. Gupta of Calcutta (no. 94118) of this series has been traced.

The British Talking Machine Co. had come to India a little late but in 1905 it assumed the name of the Gramophone Company Ltd. and

opened its office at 5, Esplanade East and established its recording factory at Beliaghata in 1907. Mr Bose frantically tried without avail to get an import licence for a recording and printing machine for disc records. He then sent to France 36 wax casts of songs sung by Tagore to be transferred to discs by the Pathephone Co. But as his ill-luck would have it, allured by the newly risen movie business the Pathe fellows ran after it leaving their recording business uncared for. Mr Bose could not recover his Tagore casts. When he died in 1916 HMV was strongly entrenched in business by dint of its privileged position in official patronage and protection.

The first Tagore song to be recorded by a singer other than Tagore himself was *bahe nirantara ananta anandadhara* (33044) sung by Surendra Maitra of Rajshahi, at that time a young professor of Presidency College who proved himself a poet afterwards. It was followed by *danda amar ankhira agey* (33045) by the same singer. These two records also were included in the Bose-Pathe enterprise.

Tagore's *Bandemotaram* (36250), also included in this series, has been traced of late.

When disc recording was introduced in India Tagore was in his forties. Harassed by Lalbazar and frustrated in establishing an up-to-date sound recording factory Mr H. Bose also had stayed away from business. Otherwise we might have got a few more recordings of the youthful voice of Tagore, particularly of the Gitanjali period. But before his death Mr Bose had the satisfaction of seeing his poet friend recognised in the international comity of arts.

Tagore songs were also recorded and published for commercial distribution between 1902 and 1905 under the BEKA trade mark by M/s. Stanely Oaks & Co. who had their offices at Calcutta, Madras, Colombo and Rangoon. The one-sided record of *oyi bhuvanamanomohini* sung by Debendralal Banerjee (21750) was published under the BEKA label. The Vielphone Co. Ltd. of Bombay were the makers of the trade mark labels Viel-o-phone and Zonophone which about the same time had made a number of records of Tagore songs which included Mr Gopal Ch. Sen Gupta and Mr S. B. Gupta. The Odeon released the song *padaprante rakha sevake* (94084) sung by Mr S. Das. These were one-sided records.

Stranger things happened in the history of recording of Indian music, particularly Tagore music, than are fully known to the singers and listeners today. Very few of the pretenders who today put forward their astounding claim of having obliged Tagore by popularising his songs reckon with the fact that Tagore music had sailed to England along with its singer-composer as far back as 1879. He rendered them personally in the renowned salons of England in 1879 and 1880 and won for his delicate singing the genuine appreciation of world famous singers living in England at that time such as Madam Albany, Madam Nielson etc. It is on record of the eminent intellectuals of Bengal that the young Tagore was

an exquisite and effective singer. By 1906 the personal recording of Tagore under the Bose-Pathe label numbered as many as fifty.

Giant Monopoly

It is no surprise that by the laws of capitalistic competition HMV was able in a short span of time to corner most of its adversaries and drive some of them out of the market. The political patronage and protection that it received from the ruling power gave it a position of supreme privilege. The Beka, Viel-o-phone and Zonophone establishments were obliged to pack up; Odeon was compelled, most probably after the great economic depression of 1929, to amalgamate with HMV; Columbia also was taken over by the Company near about this time and became a subsidiary of HMV like the Twin (the Jemini Twin was the crest of the Gramophone Co. until the dog-phonograph symbol was introduced in its stead). By 1930 the Gramophone Co. transformed itself into a gigantic monopoly which has ever since been sitting on the shoulders of Indian music like the giant of Sindhabad.

It is a matter of great curiosity that although public interest in Tagore literature and music had increased hundredfold after the Nobel award of 1913 yet the poet, who had once collaborated in the adventure of Mr H. Bose, remained least attracted by the advanced devices of phonograph recording of HMV. Was his apathy due to the unfair frustration and sad demise of his friend and admirer, Mr Bose? After going through the sequence of events that took place in the annals of Indian recording business one would rather be inclined to say, yes. It is logical to presume that the fate of the efforts of Mr H. Bose had touched the poet personally and deeply, the imprint of which was never totally lost in his over-sensitive mind. That is why we find him most disinterested in the Indian recording medium between 1906 and 1926. He did not even encourage such singers of the

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family as Sarala Devi, Indira Devi to record their voice.

But the British bania would not sit idle. In the meantime they recorded numerous songs of Tagore in original, half-baked and imaginary tunes. The original tunes were served through the voice of Miss Amala Das who took her lessons from Tagore himself so far as his songs were concerned. The spurious tunes of Mr R. P. Goswami and Miss Manadasundari Dasji have already been discussed. Some singers recorded Tagore songs in their own or imaginary tunes which greatly perturbed Tagore. The company even did not care to announce his name as the composer and pay him a farthing by way of royalty. In 1915 he sent the company a solicitor's letter but the company (HMV) pleaded innocence. They said that they did not announce Tagore's name because they had not recorded nor published any of his songs. When the records of Tagore songs by the professionals and amateurs were produced before them the company fell from the sky and pat agreed to pay the dues of royalties. By the agreement of 1926 Tagore enforced upon the company the condition of previous approval by himself or the expert appointed by him for all records of his songs to be issued from that day forward. According to that agreement Tagore recorded a few songs and recitations for the HMV discs. Some of them were released under the Columbia crest also.

But better recordings were done by the Hindusthan in 1931-32, 35 and 39. That was the last of Tagore recordings for commercial circulation.

Tagore's musical creations were recognised as genuine works of art as early as the second decade of the present century. This assertion will be borne out by the fact that the Oxford University thought it proper to publish in 1914 the research volume, *The Music of Hindostan*, of Mr A. H. Fox-strangways which is chiefly based on the musical compositions of Tagore rendered into staff notation. *The Music of India* by

the Rev. H. A. Popley published by the Madras YMCA in 1921 quotes copiously from Mr Fox-strangways' book and renders many more Tagore songs into universal staff notation. The Oxford notations were prepared from listening to Tagore's own voice. I do not know which singers of Bengal or recordings of HMV prompted this research work of international importance. Mr A. A. Bake saw some of these notations which induced him to leave Europe and come down to Santiniketan in the thirties to study

Clippings

Celebrations At The Top

In many States ministers seem anxious to get their sons and daughters married during their tenure of office. The reason: a minister can obtain some patronage from government departments even for family ceremonies. . . . During the last two years five ministers of Rajasthan arranged the marriage of their sons and daughters. All but one dazzled the common folk by lavish spending which was rarely seen even in the days of the Rajas.

Towards the beginning of this month the Andhra Revenue Minister, Sri Thimma Reddy, brought out furniture as well as foodstuff from the temple at Tirumal Tirupatti for his daughter's marriage. There are cooks and servants at the temple for the comfort of pilgrims. Since the former were all drafted to prepare the marriage feast the pilgrims had to go hungry. The pilgrims' lodge attached to the temple was similarly occupied and the pilgrims had to sleep out in the open. . . .

A tale of much greater splendour has come from Akluj in Maharashtra, where the son and daughter of Sri Shankarrao Mohite, the helmsman of many cooperative societies in the area, were married at the same time. Nothing like it was seen for the last hundred years. Union Finance Minister, Sri Y. V. Chavan, Union Agriculture Minister Sri A. P. Shinde,

Tagore's musical activity from close quarters. *Hundred Songs of Tagore* in staff notation was later published by Mr Bake.

Without dilating much on the point it can be irrefutably said that for the popularity of his songs Tagore need be grateful to no agency other than the impersonal mass media such as the radio, the talkies, the microphone etc. The glaring fact is that till August 8, 1941 Tagore had the largest number of phonographic recordings to his credit.

quite a few ministers from Maharashtra, many government officials, Congressmen, leaders of the cooperative movement and distinguished citizens joined the festivities.

On this occasion nearly 2,000 kilograms of unadulterated ghee (butter), 6,000 kilograms of potatoes and 1,000 kilograms of brinjal were consumed. At least 100,000 guests were entertained. (According to some, the number was one and a half lakhs) . . . Holiday was declared at all the local cooperatives while the employees were engaged in various activities connected with the celebrations. Seven hundred buses and trucks were employed to bring in the guests from Sholapur to the place of marriage. Eleven band parties came from different areas. Rehearsals started 30 days in advance.

How did Sri Mohite collect all the money for this sort of regal reception? He is reported to have told his guests that he did not spend even a copper. His admiring friends and 'masses' took it up as their own affair and arranged for it all. However, according to another report, 'voluntary' contribution was fixed and deducted from the salary of each and every employee of all the cooperatives with which Sri Mohite was associated. . . .

There was a strong reaction among the young Congressmen as such news

got around... The Prime Minister agreed with them in principle. But she was not prepared to accept newspaper reports as one hundred per cent true... Moreover, persons who are highly established in society, are often obliged to make elaborate arrangements despite their own wishes. Many a time people join in without an invitation and thus it is impossible not to entertain them... (Jugantar, June 26, 1971).

"Plain Living"

It is pointed out that the limits set for the furnishing of Central Ministers' offices and residences are seldom observed. While on paper they are adhered to, in actual practice renovations and furnishings far exceed these limits and are "managed" by ingenious interpretation of rules and sub-rules by interested officials. Repairs and renewals always take care of such excesses.

... It is said a former senior Minister... got the public exchequer to spend Rs 70,000 on renovating some rooms in his bungalow because he felt artistically inclined. He had got blue velvet covers for his sofas. The wall-to-wall carpet in the room had, therefore, to be changed in a particular shade of blue to go with the sofa covers and the walls also were distempered in matching blue.

A former Foreign Minister got his office room renovated at the cost of Rs 70,000. When his portfolio was changed, his new office was renovated at a cost of Rs 30,000.

... In yet another instance, a Minister took a fancy for a table-pad with inkpot costing the princely sum of Rs 500.

Not a few of the Ministers, it is said, have toilets attached to their office. At least one such toilet is of marble.

Indifference towards spending is also evident in the matter of paying water and electricity bills for a Minister's residence. The bills used to be limitless. During Mr Lal Bahadur Shastri's time, following public criticism, a limit of Rs 200 a month was

placed on the electricity bill. Any excess was to be paid by the Minister.

This was inadequate considering the number of air-conditioners, light-points and appliances used. It is said that at least one Minister got three separate meters installed in his house, under the heads, "personal", "office" and "security lights".

... Party members are also critical of the Ministers' use of sleek, imported limousines despite the Prime Minister's suggestion that as far as possible Indian cars be used. (Hindustan Times).

Countryside Diplomacy

... in the Ching Kang-shan region of Kiangsi province... one could see a lot of youth and cadres from the cities, including Shanghai who had come there to live among the peasants and undergo "ideological reform"... I could discuss with them the... visit of American pingpong players and the significance of more recent news just as I could do in Peking. According to them, the evolution of the Indochinese situation for over a year demonstrates the correctness of the strategy of encircling cities by the countryside formulated by Lin Piao in 1965. The American mistakes in Vietnam have not only trained up the people of Indochina but have similarly created a new situation in the United States where people's opposition is stronger than ever. Thus the fact that on the very day Peking celebrated "the year of unity" and victory of the Indochinese revolutionary bloc Nixon faced angry demonstrators in Washington is thought to be of symbolic significance.

From this optimistic analysis the Chinese do not however conclude that the American withdrawal from South-East Asia will be achieved smoothly. On the contrary, they consider Nixon's commitment to evacuate ground forces from Vietnam to be aimed only at deceiving his countrymen and world opinion. The pretended "overtures" and "pacific" gestures to China are placed in the

same category. In reality, they think, American imperialism is preparing for further escalation of aggression and China is not less threatened today than she was yesterday. Thus defensive preparations continue without respite. Everywhere, even in the countryside, digging of air-raid shelters, and organisation of life for war continue ceaselessly. Arrival of newcomers from cities permits the communes to release good working hands for all kinds of work, even at the peak of the agricultural season.

I have told my interlocutors, who do not have access to foreign press and radio, how the people in Europe are talking about new international orientations of the Chinese government and attaching great importance to the visit of the ping-pong team and grant of visas to American journalists. They had their answer ready. Chinese policy, according to them, develops at three levels: relation between States, relation between peoples, relation between Marxist-Leninist parties. In Peking there are organisations to deal with each of these aspects and they follow a political line strictly defined by Chairman Mao himself.

In the domain of relation between States China remains faithful to the principle of non-interference in others' internal affairs. While it is a question of developing friendship between peoples, China does not forget Chairman Mao's teaching that one should exclude class enemies from that category. And about the relation between parties China refuses to play the role of a "paternal party" which under the pretext of helping and counselling smaller parties in fact assumes their leadership and use them for its own ends.

Seen in this perspective, the... invitation to American ping-pong players does not have any other significance than strengthening of friendship with the American people against Nixon, thus weakening the imperialist camp. It has not yet been said that the massive anti-war demonstration in Washington is a product of this policy but the comparison of the two is not lacking.

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None of my interlocutors in the paddy fields of Kiangsi could speak in the name of the party or the Government but everybody had well-conceived ideas about any problem I raised. They know, as they told me, that the leaders cannot but follow the directives of Chairman Mao, which do not rule out tactical changes but would never allow deviations from internationalist and revolutionary strategy.

To further convince me they invited me to look around the villages of Maoping or Tsepin where forty years ago a small unit of the Red Army laid the basis of the world's largest people's republic. "We have achieved all this by applying Chairman Mao's directives. How could you doubt that our leaders and we ourselves will not continue to do the same in the future?" they asked. Our discussions ended with the strain of the 'Internationale' which in the villages of Kiangsi, and perhaps all over China, marks the end of a long day's work.

K. S. Karol in *Le Nouvel Observateur*

Letters

Her Majesty's Man

On June 30, New Delhi newspapers told their readers: "Prime Minister appoints Minister for Bengal Affairs" (headline, *Hindustan Times*) and "Ray named Minister for W. Bengal Affairs" (headline, *Times of India*).

At the moment four States are under President's Rule—Mysore, Gujrat, Punjab and West Bengal. Earlier, as many as on 22 occasions, President's rule was imposed on various

States. But never before was such an innovation resorted to. Under the Constitution and the prevailing conventions, the responsibility of carrying on the administration of a State under President's rule devolves upon the State Governor, as the representative of the President who, under Article 356 of the Constitution, assumes "to himself all or any of the functions of the Government of the State" in case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State.

In such a situation, appointment of a Union Cabinet Minister as a "Minister of Affairs" of a particular State encroaches upon the powers of the State Governor, as representative of the President who, under the Constitution, is to be satisfied, before taking any action in regard to a State, on the basis of the Governor's report or otherwise. Thus the appointment of Shri Siddhartha Sankar Ray as 'Minister for West Bengal Affairs' does not only constitute a violation of the Constitution but in reality it places Shri Ray in a position which, under this arrangement, will be something like that of a superboss so far as the West Bengal Governor under President's rule is concerned. Shri Ray will be the *de facto* Chief Minister of the State, though not elected by the people to be so.

In this connection it will be interesting to note what Her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria did in 1858 after the revolt of the Indian Sepoys was crushed. In 1858, Her Imperial Majesty took over the administration of India from the East India Company and made it a 'Crown Colony', appointed a Viceroy to rule India on her behalf. She also appointed "a Secretary of State for India" to advise her on affairs concerning India.

In this particular case of West Bengal, the President has delegated powers to the State Governor to carry on the functions of the State on his (President's) behalf, but the Prime Minister has appointed Shri Ray as the Minister for West Bengal Affairs. British viceroys in India used to function under the guidance and supervision of the Secretary of State for India. In the case of West Bengal,

under this new arrangement, will the State Governor have to follow the same pattern?

KALIKINKAR CHAUDHURI
New Delhi

'Everything In Order'

Mr Swaran Singh, back from his trip abroad, claimed that he was highly successful in his dealings with the U.S. Government. If success means serving the cause of U.S. imperialism in India, Mr Singh's has been a great success. In the name of aid the U.S. will be able to send a few more airforce planes on that mysterious mission called airlifting of refugees from Tripura to Gauhati, in strategic areas bordering China. Also a few more top-ranking CIA agents will visit these borders areas. Naturally; the U.S. and its agents have sound reasons to be happy.

The military junta in Islamabad is also overjoyed. The masters have not forgotten to give it some loaves of bread. Shiploads of U.S. arms are on their way to Pakistan.

Everything is in order, proceeding smoothly according to plan. The Yahya army is in reasonable control of East Bengal, plans are being finalised to hand over West Bengal to the army. The economy of Pakistan is ruined, that of India tottering under the pressure of refugee influx. But don't worry. The USA will make good the loss, if only the Indian and Pakistani Governments be good enough to abide even more by its instructions.

How beautifully U.S. imperialism has utilised the happenings in East Bengal to its benefit! Its dual role fits well with the Nixon doctrine of 'Fight Asians with Asians'. Now that Vietnam is lost, new areas must be found to be used as bases against people's struggles, against China.

The question before us all is, shall we sit idle and allow the scoundrels heading the Indian and Pakistani governments use us as fuel for the all-devouring fire of U.S. imperialism or shall we unite to face its challenge in our sub-continent?

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