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POLICY TOWARDS CHINA

IT was not for nothing that the Establishment kept rather quiet about one anniversary—of the Sino-Indian war which broke out in 1962. The defeat was humiliating and pricked many a balloon that Mr Nehru had floated. When these burst, not much was left of the policy of non-alignment. Even the unique, unilateral Chinese withdrawal in late November and the return of war equipment and prisoners of war did not help.

The policy which New Delhi has followed since the defeat has not undergone much change, though a tone of sweet reasonableness sometimes creeps into the utterances of government leaders. Peking, harbouring deep suspicions about the role the Tibetan refugees may be asked to play in future and the military implications of the Indo-Soviet treaty, particularly after the emergence of Bangladesh as a result of Indian intervention. But of late Peking has achieved some kind of a breakthrough, and the encirclement is not so suffocating as before. There are quite a few in this country who believe that some positive gesture from India now will help normalise relations with Peking. But will the Russians agree?

Public opinion will not be enraged by overtures to China—after our famous victory over Pakistan. For, after all, it was the government which had worked up popular feeling against the Chinese. Mr Nehru, with a bit of courage, could have avoided the confrontation of 1962.

A New Delhi contemporary has published an article by Pandit Sundarlal, whose name crops up when the dispute is discussed because he was in close touch with Mr Nehru, the Chinese and the Russians.

According to him, the Chinese had told Nehru when he first enquired about Aksai Chin—prodded by some politicians—that the Chinese activity there was directed against the American bases in Pakistan. Nehru was satisfied. But then the same politicians discovered that the maps showed Aksai Chin as part of India and Nehru again took up the matter with Chou En-lai. After exchange of letters, negotiations and all that the Chinese, according to Pandit Sundarlal, suggested that the whole border question between the two countries might be decided on the principle of friendly give and take—that the 18,000 square miles under Indian administration, that is, the area south of the MacMahon Line might be considered part of India; that 20,000 square miles, that is, the area

to the north of this Line lying as "no-man's-land" might also be considered part of India for the future, and only the 12,000 square miles, that is, the Aksai Chin region, which was then under Chinese administration, might be considered Chinese territory. The officials on both sides were given more time to enquire into the matter and it was agreed that, in the mean time, neither side should enter or try to enter unilaterally any part of the "no-man's land".

There were pulls and pressures, both internal and external; and Pandit Sundarlal says that he wrote to Khrushchev on his own initiative. Khrushchev, in sum, approved the Chinese scheme, adding that in lieu of the Aksai Chin area, China might give to India an equal area anywhere else, contiguous to the border line thus created.

Mr Nehru seemed satisfied; then his face fell, as was his wont, and he wondered how the 'people' would react to the giving away of the Aksai Chin area to the Chinese. Was he thinking of the people or of some politicians and foreign powers? Anyway, nothing came out of the

whole thing and the stealthy march towards disaster continued, Indian troops entered the no-man's-land—our famous "forward policy." At this Peking sent three letters to New Delhi, in the last two of which it said that if India did not desist from such violations China might have to strike back. As Sundarlal says, it appears India did not desist. The Chinese army then entered the no-man's land'. They did not cross the boundaries of the 'no-man's land' or enter Indian territory as such. After the military operations, they went back. According to Sundarlal, the Chinese invasion of India, in 1962 was no invasion of India as such. The actual conflict was confined to the area which was declared and admitted by both governments as "no-man's land".

It is time New Delhi did something—not to Pandit Sundarlal—but something to retrieve itself from the position of a hanger-on. But since it has to depend on other powers for spare parts to run the military machine, and for massive economic aid, it is unlikely to learn anything.

More Toying With Taxes

Agricultural income has been the traditional will-o'-the-wisp of India's fiscal policy. It constitutes nearly 50 per cent of the national income, but except for a few crores of rupees, most of it has remained outside the tax net. This has been blatantly incongruous and a serious drag on the economy. The problem, which has been with us for a long time, has turned more serious as agricultural production has recorded a marked rise during the past few years. Higher returns from farms have led to the emergence of a new rich kulak lobby which is exploiting on the one hand the poor agricultural labourer—whose plight is far worse than the industrial worker's—and on the other is utilising its political leverage to the maximum. Indeed, agriculture has

become a more dangerous breeding ground of social inequality and social tension than industry, not the least because it still holds nearly 70 per cent of the population.

There has always been a credibility gap in the government's efforts to tax agricultural income. And the Raj Committee report, released a few days ago, does not seem to change the situation visibly. Its most important suggestion—replacing land revenue by an agricultural holding tax—has been hailed by the government's cheer leaders as a revolutionary step and estimated to bring in an additional Rs 200 crores to the exchequer. But if the praise is too affected, the estimate itself is very much on the high side. The problem with agricultural taxation is not

that nobody has thought of how to mop up the income but nobody has thought of paying the dues. If all the agriculturists pay all the taxes they are supposed to pay, the collection would have not been much lower than what the AHT has promised. And there is no assurance that the people who do not pay land revenues and the like will pay the AHT either. The expert committee report is rather vague on this ticklish question; it observes that discussions with State chief ministers have assured the committee that there will be more willing support to the AHT proposal. But when politicians go back on public utterances, where is the sanctity for private assurances? The other major point in the committee's report is the clubbing of non-agricultural income in the farm sector with other incomes for taxation purposes. But this is only a variant of an old idea that has been with us for a long time and found unsuitable. The learned committee has spared no efforts to devise a foolproof system but all that it has succeeded in doing is to further derange the jigsaw puzzle to which the issue of agricultural taxation has been reduced over the past decades. Consciously or otherwise, it seems to have put little stress on the obvious fact—the loose pieces will fall into their places only when the political leadership makes bold to get tough with an electorally important agricultural sector—and the present leadership cannot do it.

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Dividing Waters

A possible Russo-Japanese detente seems to have bounced on the question of transfer of two islets—Etorofu and Kanashiri—off the southern tip of the Kuriles. This is an old scar. Towards the end of the Second World War the Russian took possession of them and, in spite of Tokyo's frequent requests, refused to hand them back or even to talk about their fate. Recently there had been some mellowing of the Russian attitude on the question and there were prospects of negotiations to induce the Japanese to a peace treaty. But even before the talks could begin in earnest, the Russians were embittered by Tokyo's more than usual eagerness to patch up with the Chinese.

Apprehensive of the expanding Chinese influence, the Russians want to use Japan as a bulwark against Peking and their appreciative response to Tokyo's claim to the islets—when Gromyko visited Japan—was meant to wean away Nippon from Peking. Also, the Russians need the Japanese money and skill for developing Siberia on China's northern border. An ambitious plan is already on cards that would permit the Japanese, with U.S. financial help and backing, to draw on the natural gas and oil resources there. But the Russians want the Japanese to maintain their anti-Chinese stand as a price for this economic concession.

For the Japanese their material strength is their main weakness in this political bargaining. Tanaka has the mandate of the Japanese industrial and businessmen behind his pledge that he will mend fences with the Chinese and win them back the huge Chinese market without losing the Russian resources, and also help them get elbow room against Washington. But while Tanaka can go to Peking with cap in hand and at the same time convince Washington and Taiwan of his intention to keep

his commitment to each, the Russians refuse to be taken by this logic. How can one rub shoulders with the Maoists in Peking and at the same time smile at the Kremlin? But what disturbs Tokyo most is the stiffening of Moscow's stand which may lead to its exclusion from Siberia. The rebuff that the Japanese Foreign Minister has received in Moscow has increased the anxiety.

To Russia at the moment Peking is the arch enemy—which emotion the latter reciprocates with equal vehemence. Both are sorting out their relations in the world by this yardstick. But will this hostility between the two erstwhile comrades give a long rope to other powers in the region? The Russians are already overstepping the limit. Though the Chinese have till now maintained support for the fighting nations, there is apprehension in some quarters that their zeal to outdo the Russians may lead to wrong emphases in their state-to-state relations. The November 7 message of greetings to Soviet Union, however, holds an offer of mending fences.

Personalised Elections

At one time everything seemed to be going wrong for Willy Brandt; his political future then became a subject for speculation. But in course of the last few weeks the situation has so much changed that the Chancellor has now to keep the SPD campaigners on their toes by saying that "victory is not in the bag" and that "atmosphere does not mean votes". His slender majority in the Bundestag had been steadily eroded by floor-crossing and resignation. Schiller's resignation on economic issues and the discovery of the junior ministers on the pay-roll of a weekly hostile to the Government caught Brandt with his political trousers down. It will be difficult for the Chancellor to forget the memory of a handful of deputies who forced the dissolution of the Bundestag and the

premature election. The Munich Olympics on which the country invested so much money and effort to live down a dark chapter of German history turned into a disaster. Lastly, the Opposition scored over Brandt because of his unwillingness to substantiate charges of corruption against some deputies. The two factors that have helped the Social Democrat Party to turn the table against the Christian Democrat Union are Brandt's deft management of party affairs and his Government's stepped up diplomatic activity. The watchers of the West German election scene consider Brandt's performance at Dortmund to be the real turning point for the SDP. His ordering of national priorities, his style of inspiring the rank and file are too much for his opponent Barzel to match. Barzel's rise has no doubt been spectacular, but he has a few admirers either in his Party or outside. What he badly lacks is an image—he himself admits that—without which it is difficult to beat a man like Brandt. He invites all kinds of unkind epithets from his fellow partymen. Barzel combines in him the behind-the-scene manipulation of LBJ and the political opportunism of Nixon. The personalisation of West German elections between Brandt and Barzel no doubt goes very much in favour of the Social Democrats. They have been always miles ahead of their opponents where foreign policy is concerned. While Walter Scheel had been able to lay a solid political foundation for trade between China and West Germany when he was recently in Peking, Egon Bahr had some excellent conversations with the leaders in Moscow. Fully aware that condemnation of Ostpolitik will not stand it in good stead, the CDU now claims to be looking forward to "good co-operation" with the East European countries. But the SDP is really vulnerable on domestic issues; the reforms it has introduced fall much short of the promises made after the 1969 election victory. It was, therefore, expected that the CDU would turn

the focus on internal issues at the Wiesbaden conference. Barzel described Brandt as the "Chancellor of inflation" and Franz Josef Strauss promised a return to stability if the CDU were to win the elections. Everyone, however, seems to agree that even without the services of Schiller—who helped the SPD win a

large number of votes from the middle class—and in spite of the break up of the National Democratic Party—the Christian Democrats are going to benefit from that—the Social Democrats will again form the Government with the help of the Free Democrats.

(See also page 18)

View from Delhi

Crisis Months

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

THE decisive rout of the Congress at the Ahmedabad Lok Sabha by-election was perhaps the cynical anti-climax to the 12-course austerity dinner at the AICC session there earlier. Even Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma does not know for certain that the CIA was behind the debacle. The CIA lobby of yesterday is now inside the Soviet lobby because the Soviet Union is the one super-power not yet discredited among the Indian people. The old-timers of the Soviet lobby are of course right inside the Congress party now. So the barrier between the CIA and the KGB merges somewhere. The Congress has no convincing alibi yet for the by-election setbacks. The pattern will be clear after the Cuttack assembly by-election on November 26 where Mrs Nandini Satpathy is going to be taken for a rough ride by Mr Biren Mitra.

There is little doubt that the anti-Congressism of the 'sixties is returning with new virulence. It began immediately after the Sino-Indian border war and asserted itself at the three crucial Lok Sabha by-elections in 1963. It had not worked itself out until after the mini-general election in 1969. The Maniram assembly by-election in January 1971 could be regarded the symbolic turning point for the Congress which had just split. The Con-

gress (O) Chief Minister, Mr T. N. Sengupta's decisive defeat at Maniram set the pace for the massively-rigged mandate at the March 1971 Lok Sabha elections. Cuttack, where the instant Chief Minister of Orissa decided to contest in the belief that Mr Biren Mitra would not file the nomination papers, might acquire the same symbolism Maniram came to acquire.

Paradoxically, the country is returning to another spell of anti-Congressism even as the Prime Minister is trying to project for herself the image of a leader who is not partisan. From open partisanship, she is trying to be the very model of constitutional propriety. She even wants the Sardar Patel Centenary celebrated with gusto even as her CPI friends maintain that Patel was a reactionary. In Tamil Nadu, her Home Ministry is willingly making Central Reserve Police units available to Mr Karunanidhi to break up the Anna DMK. She has maintained silence about the alleged breakdown of law and order in the State and has left all the talking to her minions. It might be part of the effort at a new image, of a leader above party loyalties. Few remember that as President of the Congress in 1959, she had the honour of sanctifying India's first extra-constitutional agitation to topple a lawfully constituted Government in

Kerala. Some of her statements of those days alleged to have been wrongly interpreted by the Pradesh Congress knight-errants, are still available in the archives of the Congress party.

Her reluctance to dismiss the Karunanidhi Government immediately seems to flow from self-interest. No political preparation seems to be on for such a toppling manoeuvre. The report from the Governor about the breakdown of law and order could be got to order with Mr K. K. Shah in the Madras Raj Bhavan. But Mrs Gandhi is not too sure that the fresh elections to the Tamil Nadu Assembly that would be inevitable would go in her favour. The DMK has not split vertically yet. Mr M. G. Ramachandran happens to enjoy the support of a section of the lumpen proletariat and the split has to move vertically, base upwards. Which is unlike the Congress split down the middle in 1969. The Congress being a sparse quantity in Tamil Nadu, the Central leadership finds itself sidelined on the DMK split. The Congress stands to gain very little as a result of the split and Mr M. G. Ramachandran's achievement would be negative to the extent he could break up the DMK. The Congress (O) is still the second largest force in the State. Mr Karunanidhi has even declared that he would rather make way for Mr Kamaraj than hand over the State to the "enemies of Tamil".

So Mrs Gandhi would be playing for high stakes if she chooses to engineer a law and order situation in Tamil Nadu. The only instance of a ministry being dismissed for failure to fulfil its law and order obligation was in 1959, when the E.M.S. Namboodiripad ministry was ousted in Kerala though its House majority was never in doubt and the Congress could not manage the defection of just two MLAs needed to vote the Communists out of office.

If the Congress loses the Cuttack by-election, the risk arising out of any intervention in Tamil Nadu would indeed be big. In the normal

course, Mrs Gandhi should prefer Mr Karunanidhi to Mr Kamaraj, for more than one reason. This perhaps explains Mr Karunanidhi's reluctance to allege a Central plot against his ministry. To him the Prime Minister is the very epitome of constitutional rectitude and the belligerency of her drummer boys is something to be viewed independent of the Prime Minister. The Congress cannot afford an election in Tamil Nadu in the near future because the bluff of the Indira wave might be called more convincingly and it might also mean the revival of the Congress (O) fortunes.

Foodgrains

The buffer stock of foodgrains is running out fast and the kharif procurement is far below expectation. The pressure on prices continued through October when there should have been a seasonal fall. The Government is reluctant to admit that the food situation is going to be grave after March 1973. Which means a general deterioration of law and order right into the coming year. There is visible nervousness among the leaders, the by-election results compounding the fears. The victory in last year's war has already turned sour because Mrs Gandhi could not translate it into "durable" peace. Worse, the burden of refugees and the short war are blamed along with the drought and the CIA for the crisis situation. The whole economy was war-heated throughout last year and it was not as if the war was fought within the limits of the Defence Ministry's revenue budget. The nation is paying for the luxury of 10 million refugees and a 14-day war. After all the brave talk of not withdrawing troops from the international border until delineation of the line of control in Kashmir was completed, Mrs Gandhi had to climb down to offer withdrawal without having to wait for delineation. The hard line with Pakistan is already proving counter-productive.

Adding to New Delhi's humiliation is the non-role to which India

was relegated on the Vietnam negotiations. The much-vaunted role as Chairman of the Control Commission will be coming to an end soon, the symbolic demise of anything that might be left of India's non-alignment. Recognition of North Vietnam's importance came rather late and grudgingly and in the opportunistic belief that Hanoi-Peking

differences would sharpen sooner or later. Hanoi named its Ambassador to India in June and he was already on his way to New Delhi when objection to the same was conveyed belatedly. And it turned out that India had named its man for Hanoi when Hanoi announced a new name earlier in the week.

November 4, 1972

Assam

After The Verdict

HIREN GOHAIN

REACTION in Assam has found unexpected support in the recent Supreme Court verdict quashing the petition of G. C. College, Silchar, against the decision of the Academic Council of Gauhati University on the medium of instruction of the university. Crackers went off in Gauhati celebrating "Assamese victory" on the night of October 26. Chauvinism will from now on feel as though it is armed with legal backing for its righteousness. A counter-chauvinism of the desperate variety will certainly grow stronger among the Bengalis who live in concentrated groups. Unless the leftist forces hold their ranks closely, they might break into disarray. After all, the casualties may very well include not only the rights of the minorities, but the very idea of a democratic discussion in matters affecting different neighbouring communities. In Assam where since 1951 there have been serious riots every two or three years, the apparent victory of a show of force may tempt the middle class more and more into fascist solutions.

Not that the verdict was quite unexpected. From the pronouncements of the Central leaders, the manoeuvres of the ruling group in the State Congress, and the line taken by papers close to government circles in Calcutta and New Delhi,

one had long had an inkling of how things would turn out. One even had the wild impression sometimes that recent events were all a part of a pre-arranged show, with important announcements chiming in with critical turns in the development, and with noted personalities blandly playing out their parts.

The movement, in spite of a tendency towards disruption in the end, showed very remarkable organisational skill. It succeeded in mobilising the existing media for enlisting wide support among students and the educated classes, including lawyers, doctors and businessmen. Speed in responding to sudden turns in events was much in evidence (though, of course, there was hardly any serious opposition to outwit). Resources also seemed to pour in from somewhere. Only someone who investigates for three or four months closely will be in a position to unravel how it all happened.

Bengali resistance, simply because it often assumed the unsympathetic form of Bengali chauvinism, was unavailing. Some leftists, no doubt not compelled by the predominantly bourgeois environment to purge a streak of bourgeois opportunism in them, had also lined up on either side, invoking realism. Circles outside the ruling group in the Congress tried to steer the agitations

into an anti-Sarat Sinha line. But, with a little guidance from New Delhi, Mr Sinha has neatly got the better of them with a flank movement. Over large areas, again, the riots assumed a religious communal character, with immigrant Muslims (who have accepted Assamese) and Hindu refugees (who have not) battling it out. Anger and panic, anxiety and incitement certainly led to atrocities, though some Calcutta papers (one called Kamrup, a big district, a town) depended largely on imagination to furnish details. Two Assamese students were brutally murdered by desperate mobs. Bengali deaths number at least seven, though it is not considered proper to express sympathy for them. Both sides were armed with lethal weapons, though this seems to be the first introduction to such contraptions as acid bulbs for Assamese anti-social elements.

The political parties somewhat belatedly condemned the riots. They seem to have been taken by surprise by the riots, probably made less alert by sincere professions of peaceful intentions. But they did not participate in the movement, to the indignation of those who did. (Of course some parties could not control their members). The CPI and the RCPI leaders did not fare well with crowds that demanded greater militancy. In the end, eight political parties, including even the Congress and the CPI, issued an appeal for peace and patient discussion that had a sobering effect. But most of them lack a mass base and willy-nilly have to tail the middle class which has acquired a taste and flair for direct agitation over certain things. This time minority organisations like the PTC and the URP defended the rights of the Bengali community, but outside their following they do not have much influence.

The decision of the Supreme Court may well accelerate the plans to separate Cachar. Already certain sections of the population are vocal with this demand for separation of Cachar, while the peo-

ple of Cachar themselves do not want it. If it is done, the chauvinists of both the camps will be triumphant. It is a disturbing thought that this may serve as a precedent for further dismemberment of Assam, as communities deprived of scarce resources seek territorial solutions of a problem created by capitalism in a backward country. Indeed the Central administration may consider such units, small and weak, easier to handle, or to pit against each other. Already, boundary disputes between some of them have acquired the character of small-scale wars.

At this moment, however, the Centre is profiting most from the situation. Will a pattern emerge in near future of creating such de-

mands, getting people agitated over them, and finally stepping in gracefully to fulfil those demands? Thus Assamese chauvinism is unwittingly playing into the hands of the Centre. The initiative is still very much with the bourgeoisie who choose their moments and the places before striking. We have failed as yet to build up an extensive organization for launching any effective popular democratic movement, directed against the real enemies of the people.

Finally, what about the CIA? I am sure they are active, but it is only fair to report that certain intellectuals, radio artistes and journalists consider me one of its busiest agents. I have never doubted their sagacity.

October 27, 1972

Green Revolution Not So New

NARENDRA SINGH

THE Indian 'green revolution' is lauded and played up by the local leaders and experts as well as by others as a solution of the food problem and a promise for the country's economic progress and rapid development. But where does it lead to in reality? In the context of imperialism and monopoly capitalism, the economic and political implications of local policies, subservient to foreign interests, are bound to be against the interest of the nation. On the native physical and social ecology, the impact of objectives and techniques transplanted from countries of Europe and America cannot but be adverse.

Historically, 'green revolution' is not altogether a novel innovation in India. In its background, mood, objectives and approaches, something similar was attempted one hundred years ago, as is evident from a recent publication compiled from the India Office Library and Records (*Agrarian Conditions in Northern India*, Vol. I, *The United Province under British Rule, 1850-1900*, by Elizabeth Whit-

combe, University of California Press, 1972). Reading it, one just cannot but feel that history is being repeated. To begin with, the author depicts the mood of the authorities in the 1860s, after transfer of power from the East India Company to the British Crown, as follows: "In their awareness meanwhile of great temporal power and from a conviction of the rightness of *Britain's* self-appointed role to create a model amongst the *Empire* spokesmen of the *Crown* Government stressed the responsibility inherent in the task of enlarging upon its inheritance not to supplant the existing social order, but to shepherd it firmly to modernity" (p. ix, emphasis ours). Substitute the three emphasised words by New Congress, the Third World and Indira, and the professions of present-day rulers would be clear.

The dominant aim of the enterprise under the Crown was to stimulate the lagging productivity of traditional agriculture within the shortest space of time and in areas where investment necessary to achieve this

aim might be assured of a generous as well as rapid return, and it was assumed with confidence that the society would inevitably share in the benefits that modernisation implied. Henceforth, routine administration was geared to modernisation, in accordance with the contemporary Western principles; elements of innovation, technical and others, were distinguishable from the environment into which they were introduced, by their definably foreign origin—an origin known in detail from contemporary literature on engineering techniques and the political and legal institutions of the nineteenth-century Britain; new economic institutions and incentives were grafted onto an intricate pattern of old, local relationships, once flexible but, by mid-nineteenth century, increasingly subject to constriction. Thus was enforced the transplant of technical, economic and political approaches of the West by the British experts at that time.

No different are the aims, objectives and approaches behind the 'green revolution' of today, being implanted under inspiration from and innovations by 'international' experts from the West, predominantly of the USA, sponsored by world monopoly interests. The only difference is that the present programmes are being implemented with the blessings of the native rulers by the local experts, the native elites trained in and idolising the Western model of economic, technological and political development.

The capitalist West essentially aimed at promotion of commodity-oriented agriculture. As a result, the sudden and uneven stimulus administered to the local agriculture in India, in the 1860s and later, led to the creation of cases of good soil, well watered and attended by benefits of the optimum in natural resources allied with the maximum in profitable new lines of cultivation. Highly selective crop increases occurred: Wheat, increasingly important as an export staple from the mid-1970s, benefited consistently, as

did other 'valuable' crops, notably cotton and sugarcane, indigo and opium, the latter ones introduced for large-scale cultivation under the new impetuses and incentives; millets and pulses, on which the overwhelming majority of the population depended for food and fodder, were not adopted for artificial irrigation; pastures and 'waste' lands with less and less animal products and firewood also declined. As is well known, indigo was eliminated with the discovery of synthetic dye bases, opium moved out to China, cotton got shifted to the rich black soils in the south, and wheat remained the main export crop of northern India until displaced by American wheat in world trade and commerce.

How similar is the pattern of developments under the present 'green revolution', with promotion of selected crops in package programmes in selected areas of optimum natural resources and under intensive artificial inputs for maximum returns! High-yielding strains have made wheat again the man cash crop, relegating even sugarcane to second place; new crops, like soyabean, etc. are being introduced to promote demands for new products and new technology; common pulses, not fitting in the new commodity-oriented agricultural pattern, are again getting displaced, causing shortage of cheap and simple protein foods and also of household fuel, as that from *arhar*; the urban supply schemes and processing centres have even made milk a cash commodity, displacing local production of *ghee*, with the result that even the former cheap and nutritious butter-milk (*matha*) is no more commonly available in village homes. In today's world, the follow-up of such developments, dictated by the dominant monopoly interests, could only follow a more subservient pattern than that in the last century.

Impact on Ecology

The impact of the then new trends in agriculture (1860-1900) on the ecology of the land was all the more disturbing. The burden on land

through persistent heavy cropping for the 'valuable' produce led to deterioration in fertility, which was further aggravated by the decrease in organic manure from animals whose numbers declined because of the narrowing of pastures and more particularly because wells were displaced by canals for irrigation. Most serious of all, however, was the effect on the delicate mechanism or the hydrological cycle. Deforestation, obstruction of natural drainage by public work embankments of roads and railways, together with later seepage and flush irrigation from canals sharpened the natural tendencies towards accumulation of toxic quantities of alkali salts in the upper layers of the soil over vast areas of low-lying tracts in northern India. Everybody is familiar with numerous, vast alkali (*usar*) patches, as white scabs on the face of the land there, which are in the main the consequences of the totally profit-motivated agricultural policy of the last century for maximum returns in the shortest possible time, with no concern at all

Introducing

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for immediate or long-term harm to the local ecological environment.

It is too early for the ecological implications of the modern 'green revolution' to manifest themselves, but the generic factors are there in the intensive inputs of chemical fertilizers, irrigation, pesticides, and of mechanisation, in intensive production cycles of 'valuable' crops out of tune with the evolved and established rotational practices, and in cultivation of mono-culture species and strains, results not of natural evolution and selection but of induced mutation and genetic manipulations.

As for social ecology at that time, it was found that every innovation and development (expansion of agriculture, flourishing trade in agricultural products, scientific principles of revenue assessment and inflexibility of their operation in practice, etc.) made demands on existing institutions far out of proportion to their capacity. The inevitable dislocation which followed, at each stage, in the physical and social environment could not be remedied in consonance with the immediate interests of the Government, which depended heavily on the maintenance of the status quo, however distorted it might have become. For example, a logical working of new laws could have led to expropriation of the zamindari and talukdari classes and a revolutionary social change, but compromise saw to it that a system of legal reliefs grew alongside the debt and alienation laws to rescue the indebted proprietor; only a depressed peasantry was left labouring in a distorted environment. How does it compare with the present? The ruling party and the Government, since the transfer of political administration from the British, have continuously been compelled by situations and pressures, old and new, to voice radical slogans. The 'green revolution' only creates further pressures, and more vociferous than in the past have been the recent slogans and professed moves for land reforms and changes in land relations, prompted by the advice of liberal-radical and radical-liberal ex-

perts. But compromises continue, because the feudal and semi-feudal interests remain dominant on the socio-economic and political scene. Only the vast majority of the rural population suffer and get more and more impoverished.

However, the stimulated expansion of agriculture and flourishing trade in agricultural products in the nineteenth century, motivated and promoted by the colonial interests through their representatives in India, could not go on unabated. Not so promising were the results of transplant of innovations and the commodity approach, foreign in origin, on the native agriculture of characteristically different physical and social ecology, alongside an administration incapable of giving assurances. This soon turned the entrepreneurs of world trade in wheat to larger and less encumbered sources in America. Their old and inefficient suppliers in India were left to exploit the local distorted ecological and economic environment in ways to which the stimulus to increase had led them. Such a development would have made greater impact under the present 'green revolution', when the Indian comprador bourgeoisie, subserving the much stronger world monopoly interests, forms the other section of local vested interests dominating the socio-economic and political scene.

Attention must be drawn to a significant point, generally missed in analyses. During the colonial period, India happened to be that large country where the department of agriculture and later even the expanding education in agriculture—the mainstay of the vast majority of the people—used a foreign language not at all intelligible to the common man of the area; and the foreign agricultural experts, and later also the native ones, all along remained alien to the village folk. The situation in modern India in this respect has not changed from what it was in the last century. This is not surprising. After all, there is an obvious similarity in basic philosophy

and approach behind the efforts at 'agricultural modernisation' in the two periods: attempted promotion of (capitalist) agriculture around commodity production, based on intensive inputs and investment for quick and maximum profits under technical assistance of an alienated class of privilege-seeking professionals, wholly unconcerned with the physical, social, economic and political implications for the native society in general and the common people in particular, and under overall manoeuvring dictates of imperialist and monopoly interests of the world.

In the late nineteenth century the social environment had undergone sufficient distortion and a social upheaval would have been inevitable, provided there had emerged a strong national bourgeoisie capable of overthrowing the ruling forces of imperialists and their native feudal allies. In other words, objective conditions for a profound social change were there, but the subjective forces capable of leading such a change were missing and it was not for the imperialists to assist a process only for self-destruction. This is a fact of history. Today also the objective conditions for revolution are there in different parts of India. But a social-democratic leadership, serving the interests of the feudal and comprador bourgeoisie, cannot lead such a revolution. Nor can a combine of social democrats, bureaucrats and technocrats of the privileged classes readily assist a process which would only take away their own privileges. Such a task can be performed only under the leadership of revolutionary forces of peasants and workers, in alliance with other sections of the society struggling for democracy and freedom. In contrast with the last century, the necessary subjective forces capable of taking advantage of the objective conditions for revolution have emerged. The agricultural history of the last century is not to be repeated in its total sequence now. This is the brightest feature of the present.

The China Nixon Didn't See—I

NEVILLE MAXWELL

THE slogans are ubiquitous, inescapable—on walls, in windows, picked out in skyline lettering, they flash and linger on the retina: Drink Coca-Cola; Play Sony; Try a Little VC10-erness. Cross the border from Hong Kong into China, from one world to another, and slogans await there too, white on fresh red hoardings, fading on old walls, picked out in stones on a hillside: not so ubiquitous, not nearly so insistent, but now tantalizing—illegible.

So it becomes a set task of my interpreter, waiting at Canton station, to translate slogans: Serve the People; Dare to Think, Dare to Act; Put Politics in Command; Eradicate Bourgeois Ideology, Foster Proletarian Ideology. China is more important to the world as an idea than as a place, and these slogans look like the first clues to the nature of the idea.

But what do they mean? Even when translated, some of them remain opaque. Eradicate Bourgeois Ideology. This is put to me again as one of the themes of what is described as their own "ideological remoulding" by a group of young workers in a textile factory. I have been through the factory, noted the machines the workers have recently evolved or modified to speed production, drunk many cups of green tea and taken down columns of production figures.

These indicate that there has been a marked surge since the last years of the 1960s, and this is explained primarily in terms of the changed attitudes of the workers themselves and their mates. They use the phrase, and I ask: what exactly is meant by

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"eradicating bourgeois ideology"? A moment's discussion in Chinese, then an answer: "Well, it means stop thinking like a bourgeois." That seemed circular. "But what does it mean to you? What is the characteristic that for you sums up what you call bourgeois ideology?" No discussion this time, but an instant and unanimous answer in a word: "Selfishness."

The other part of the slogan translated itself; "proletarian ideology" must mean selflessness. So the slogan I first saw blazoned on a new bridge in Canton, lumpy and jarring in English, needed a double translation. Language first, and then from the idiom of politics into what we would call ethics. It then came out as something like, Forget Yourself, Think of Others, a rephrasing of the key injunction issued by Chairman Mao Tse-tung in 1967, climactic year of the cultural revolution: Fight Self, Fight Self-Interest.

The slogans are only a visual echo of a profound educational effort, sustained constantly and in every quarter of the society. The lesson starts in the kindergarten, where the toddler is encouraged not only in self-reliance but in its necessary complement, mutual aid—and those are two more of the most insistent maxims in China. The teaching goes on through every stage of life, persistent, but never, it seems, hectoring; in songs and dances, in city theatres or the open air, where the traveling troupes act for the nomads I met in the grasslands of Inner Mongolia; in the study sessions that are daily—and sometimes twice daily—held in every factory or workshop, every rural village, in any lane or courtyard of the cities.

The favourite texts are the "three constantly read articles" by Mao: "Serve the People," a threnody on the accidental death of a Long March veteran, of which the essential mes-

sage is "all people... must care for each other, must help and love each other"; "In Memory of Norman Bethune," a Canadian surgeon who died in 1939 while working with the Communist Eighth Route Army, and of whom Mao said, "We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from him"; and "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains," a fable of peasant perseverance and Homeric optimism.

These are the basic lessons of a didactic drive aimed at nothing less than the construction of a new morality, driving out the values of the old order and replacing them with principles for conduct and attitude that will reflect and reinforce the exaltation of public welfare over private interest.

This, then, is the idea that China embodies now. The Chinese see and express it in political terms. But essentially the concepts are moral.

Exhortation is the smaller part of the teaching, which relies primarily on example. Example, indeed, and emulation, provide the dynamic of Chinese society, which has no place whatever for competition—unless the ghost of competition is seen in the emulation of excellence. But excellence lies in *attitude* far more than in achievement; it is the spirit in which tasks are tackled that counts, not the quantity or even quality of work done.

Even less is excellence related to the kind of work; no occupation in China now has kudos attached to it—except manual labour. This, which always has been—and remains—the theme of existence for the masses, is in China the great leveller, antidote for the impulses of self-aggrandizement (what we could call ambition) or self-indulgence, which are seen as the essence of the "bourgeois." So a man is bourgeois not because he or his background in the old order was middle-class, but because he in some,

or every, way puts himself above the common good. Thus, as Mao put it, a change from one class to another can be accomplished by a change of feelings.

If nine weeks of travel in China brought me to that interpretation of the idea of the society, I had made also a journey in political self-exploration. Perhaps this should be for every Western inquirer there—he may find himself even more alien to China in social attitude than in race or nationality. In the *Quotations* of Mao (there is no better *Baedeker* for travel in China, in both dimensions) one comes across this: "In class society every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of class"; and in myself, as in the reactions and writings of kindred visitors, I saw that sometimes demonstrated. Scepticism is crucial for the writer; but beneath scepticism may sometimes lie a search for grounds for disbelief that is defensive, at bottom self-serving. For if China is what it appears to be, then the challenge China throws at our own society and all who live well within it, is profound.

But there must be scepticism. If Chinese society appears harmonious as well as dynamic, relaxed as well as equal, must it not be somehow deceptive? Utopia means "no-place"; there must be a fallacy here. Human nature—how about that? The Chinese have their answer ready; they have, after all, thrashed out these questions as long as anyone. Your "human nature", they say, is the misshapen thing your own society requires it to be—competitive, inturned, uneasy, limited. "We don't think in terms of human nature but of human capacities—and we think those are limitless."

By transforming his thinking in accordance with the moral norms and material aspirations of revolutionary society, man vastly increases his capacity for action—for invention and creation as well as for labour. Thus the transformation of the inner world of man makes possible—indeed

entails—the transformation of the objective world of his environment. In Marx's phrase, man becomes the sovereign of his circumstances. So if the inner landscape of Chinese man is changing, this should be reflected, demonstrated, in the physical landscape of China.

In the modish terms of agricultural development, then, red revolution becomes green revolution? Even from the train, smooth if somewhat leisurely to Peking, the answer is clear. Perhaps the settled Chinese countryside has always looked like an endless panoramic garden, but it is changed. The cragged fields of traditional Asia, stunted progeny of countless centuries of subdivision, have gone, replaced by broad sweeps of cropland divided only according to the requirements of farming. There are still tiny, "ten-sided" fields, as the Chinese call them, dug out of odd corners, sandwiched between rocks, elongated alongside roads or railways, or perched on the shoulders of seemingly inaccessible hills. But these express not the struggling peasant farmer's search for land, but the community's resolve that no patch of ground, however unpromising, should go to waste.

Gone too is the other sign of the poor peasant economy, the solitary figures, dwarfed by the landscape, toiling alone. The characteristic sight now is that of a team, from a dozen to several score, men, women and, at high season, children, working together. Sometimes, and especially when at constructional rather than seasonal jobs—breaking new ground, digging a channel or sinking a well—they fly red banners, expressing and fortifying the elan with which such work is tackled.

If the rice and cotton fields, size apart, must look much as they always have, the myriad assertion of trees on the landscape is wholly new. Copses, avenues, plantations, whole forests, planted, tended, endless in their numbers and variety—it is as if every Chinese has planted at least a hundred trees, and has only just begun.

The social organization behind all this is the people's commune—and wherever you go in rural China you are in a commune. I visited sixteen, in five provinces and Inner Mongolia; some I had singled out myself, some the Chinese had suggested; others I saw because, finding a gap in a well-packed programme, I would call in on a village at random, unannounced and unexpected. Walking across the fields to a team, this one mostly of women and youngsters, stripping jute—I notice the older women have brought low wooden stools for comfort. They stop and cluster, friendly, invite me to the village—tea again.

By the time we get there, half a mile away, three members of the revolutionary committee, the leadership of this unit of the commune, have come in from the fields at the double to greet me. Pleased, curious, gratified by a stranger's interest—no foreigner has come to the village before—welcoming. Chairs and a table are brought into a sunny courtyard outside the granary, once a landlord's house.

When I say I want to talk about the commune, spontaneously they begin with the history of their tiny corner of the revolution; then they give direct replies to specific questions about crop yields, income, and its distribution: How much to the emergency fund? How much for capital accumulation? How much distributed to the members? The secretary brings his books. Problems? "Well, yes, we're still waiting for a tractor. We ordered one—a 'walking tractor'—two years ago, but everyone wants one now. It's not so bad, though; we've started electric ploughing." What on earth is that? "We connect up electric motors to winches and use those to pull the ploughs—much faster and better than cattle; we do almost all our fields that way now."

(Whatever suspicions they bring, most Western visitors to China seem to become convinced that things are not staged for them—the difficulty is to convince others who have not been to China. I never felt that any at-

tempt was being made to mislead or deceive me; and those random calls in unexpected villages confirmed that what I saw and heard in prearranged visits was no different, in content or feel, from what I would get if unannounced.)

The communes are organizations, not institutions. They were the culmination of the Chinese peasantry's steady move along the path of collectivization after 1949, from the 'mutual aid team,' a pooling only of labour and a few tools and animals, through the cooperatives, where land too began to be pooled, to the "advanced cooperatives," where ownership of the land began to be vested in the collective. And then, by all the evidence, spontaneously, these advanced cooperatives began in 1958 to federate so as to be able to take on the big schemes of irrigation and land reclamation called for in "the great leap forward." These took the name "people's commune," were investigated, approved and commended by the leadership ("Communes are fine," said Mao, for once prosaic). Within a year, after an extraordinary burst of organization, all of China was structured into communes.

Since then there have been many modifications, even reversals; urban communes no longer exist because the structure was found unsuitable for cities; I saw no communal dining hall, and heard of none in use now. They had been tried in the first impetuous rush and, like much else, discarded as impractical. "We really should aim at having them again," said Mrs Sung, one of the remarkable leaders of the exemplary Tachai Brigade in Shansi. "They make sense—but they won't work until they can cater to everyone's different taste, and even then probably some people would eat at home."

There are now just over sixty thousand communes, and from what I saw of them, they are flexible and sophisticated organizations, democratically run, the vehicles for a continuing revolution both in farming techniques and in peasant attitudes. They are at once the apex of the collec-

tive structure and the base of the administration, combining the roles of the lowest unit of government (the old *hsiyang*) with that of organizing and rationalizing production. The commune is responsible for education, health and hygiene, defence (it runs the militia), farming and all the "side occupations," which can range from beekeeping to noodle-making to cormorant fishing; and also for the proliferating range of a light industry, using local raw materials and sources of power, which, under the maxim of self-reliance, is beginning to industrialize China's countryside.

But it is in the field of development projects, conceived, planned and carried out under local resources, that the communes' achievement has been most dramatic. Diking rivers or even straightening out their bends to create new arable land, tunneling and throwing up dams, digging reservoirs and systems of connecting channels ("melons on a vine"), establishing plantations and tree belts against erosion—there seems no practical limit to what the villagers of China will now take on.

The hamlet or village (described as a "production team") is still almost universally the basic unit of the communes, the element in which ownership of land is vested. From six to a dozen or more of these teams will comprise a production brigade (the size varying with local conditions), and these, totaling at least several hundred families, are able independently to take on such tasks as the local sectors of river control projects, and also to provide services—schools, clinics, workshops, shops, and pensions, loans and grant—to the members or teams. The commune itself is a federation of these brigades, able to call on the labour and resources of all for projects of common benefit, to cooperate with other communes in even bigger schemes, and to begin developing substantial industrial projects as well as a fuller and more developed range of services for all members.

The sense of community is tangi-

ble in the communes. The structure appears to give the members the feeling of participation and control. The leadership at each level is elected, and full meetings of the teams are held several times a month, brigade meetings only a little less often; it is at these meetings that such matters as the division of income between capital accumulation, community services and distribution to members are decided.

Meetings of the commune as a whole are unmanageable as a rule (tens of thousands or more involved), but the commune leadership is elected by the membership, and keeps in close operative contact with the brigades. Since the cultural revolution, the leadership of the communes is almost always entirely drawn from within; there are no more "directors" appointed from above.

In all but a very few "advanced" brigades, the peasant family maintains its private plot—allotted, not owned—making up in sum about six percent of the commune's land. This provides a family with vegetables or the like for its own consumption (often tobacco is planted), and can also be an additional source of income since surplus produce is saleable to the state.

Ideologically the private plot is now seen to be neutral, a practical device rather than a concession to the "spontaneous capitalist tendencies," which, as Mao saw, the peasants sometimes demonstrated in the early years after liberation. "The peasant's emotional attachment to his land," upon which so many sympathetic Western agronomists have placed so much emphasis, has been shown in China to have been largely mythical—or perhaps to have been circumstantial rather than innate, like a mid-Atlantic swimmer's attachment to his life belt. What the Chinese peasant can now be seen to care about is the level and content of his life, and by all the evidence I saw, he has been wholly convinced that that is best served by collective ownership and communal effort.

(To be concluded)

Ezra Pound

RANJAN K. BANERJEE

TO speak of Ezra Loomis Pound is to speak of an age and of one who spanned it. In a sense he is the first of the moderns who forced the Victorian mutts out of their naturalistic straitjacket. His distinction is elsewhere too; he is a kind of ultimate journalist, slightly eponymous perhaps, but turning all the same to the adulteries of the age with undiluted venom:

Pull down thy vanity, it is not
man
Made courage, or made order,
or made grace,
Pull down thy vanity, I say
pull down.

Learn of the green world what
can be thy place...

His poetry is remarkable for its montage of rapid close-ups. The images never become detached; they always relate to the real situation, flowing into form as fluid does. More style than form? Yes, at

moments more deliberate nobility than in any contemporary poet, but there is its direct opposite too, nervous obsession, nightmare, stammering confusion, loss of self-control. "Under white clouds, cielo di Pisa out of all this beauty something must come." Elysium? He is not very sure. However, the butterfly of romantic imagination has gone out through his smoke hole. Whatever may come, it is not to be a make-believe world of happiness. "I don't know how humanity stands it with a painted paradise at the end of it".

A fascist? A supporter of Nazism? Could have been tried for treason. Instead he was put to the maddening agony of twelve long years in a mental asylum which reduced him to the wreckage of the last silent years. The Americans spared him his life. What more concessions could be made to the fascist who wrote "We have not yet calculated the sum—gorilla plus bayonet"? Surely no American in his senses could be that sacrilegious!

The wreckage of Europe, that is the theme of his poetry, in a sense. At least of the *Cantos*. His poetry, in the final analysis, is the poetry of terror. But his treatment aestheticizes the horror:

but the man should live
in that further terror, and live
the loneliness of death came
upon me
(at 3 p.m., for an instant)
three solemn half notes
their white downy chests black-
rimmed
on the middle wire...

A wry, careful, mildly debunking tone, that is also so unmistakably Pound's:

Oh to be in England now that
Winston's out
Now that there's room for doubt

And the bank may be the
nation's
And the long years of patience
And labour's vacillations
May have let the bacon come
home...

Never an apostle of the kitchen-sink, Pound sought to revolutionize poetry. The result was the Imagist Movement. Or, Coexistential Poetry in which a link is provided between the Lion and the Rose which man cannot ignore without being ignorant. The Imagist poets determined:

1. To use the language of the common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word, not the merely decorative word.
2. To create new rhythms, as the expression of new moods.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subjects.
4. To present an image, since poetry should not deal with vague generalities but should render particulars exactly.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, for concentration is the very essence of poetry.

However, Pound who wrote some of the earliest Imagist poems, knew that one could not formulate poetry. "Barometer follows nobody's direction", he once said to Amiya Chakravarty, "nor does the cherry grow peaches. In the brain of the cherry there is only one idea—the cherry".

Especially in Pound's *Cantos* there is no transmission through time; we pass without comment from ancient Greece to modern England, from modern England to medieval China. "This has irritated some of your critics. Why do you do that?" Amiya Chakravarti asked Pound when he visited the poet in the mental asylum. "Heraclitus said, all is fluid. And Confucius knew that you cannot reduce or formulate Time", replied Pound. Hence flux is his theme, especially in the *Cantos*. The impression therefore is one of continuous flow; no edges, no convexities, nothing to impede the timeless symphony. But can such a poem have a mathematical structure? Well, the impressions are related like the notes

নতুন কবিতা সংকলন

তেরঙ্গার রঙ্গ কত!

পার্শ্বসারথি সেনগুপ্ত

দাম ছ' টাকা

প্রাপ্তিস্থান: প্রধানত কলিকাতা ও হাওড়া
ষ্টেশনের বিভিন্ন ষ্টলে

in a symphony, creating a kind of personal anthology of what Pound regards as the high and noble moments in human culture. The structural pattern of the poem is that of the interrupted anecdote; the method is kaleidoscopic, Pound beginning with a translation from a famous passage in the *Odyssey*, switching over to Greek mythology and then to the heroes and villains of the American Revolution, telling a story about someone, breaking it off in the middle to tell another story about someone else, not even pausing to pick up the dropped threads. Any thesis about society? Certainly there is one in the passages about China and Adams, about Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren and their struggle with great national banking interests in the United States in the name of cheap money and the small man. Adams stands for an American culture based on the independent farmer and the wealth of the land, as against Alexander Hamilton's vision of concentrated financial power, and China is the symbol of a stable agrarian society the peaceful history of which is contrasted with the violent history of the Western world. Pound's longest poem has another point of interest; it is a kind of intellectual autobiography, despite the poet's hatred for the subjective approach. Hence the final judgement about the *Cantos* is a judgement about Pound, about the measures of truth and illusion in his understanding of the reality.

"Pound's literary criticism is the most important contemporary criticism of its kind", writes Eliot. What are Pound's chosen areas? The art of writing and of writing poetry in particular; areas of poetry which no future of poetry can afford to ignore—Pound's brief but significant notes on these we can least afford to do without. The real point of attack in some of the Pound essays is the idolatry of a great artist by unintelligent critics. His disparagement of Milton, for instance, merits more serious consideration than many of the academic eulogies. Another point of interest

is that Pound's criticism is always addressed to his fellow craftsman, whether he is giving his attention to the enunciation of general principles or to the reassessment of neglected authors and to expounding neglected literatures.

Whether in his poetry or in his

critical writings Pound never follows the traditional curve. And his progress is sometimes through self-awareness, sometimes through self-realization but sometimes through self-destruction. And he achieves consistency of another kind, perhaps that of an eccentric's.

Two One-Acts By Sayam

HITEN GHOSH

THE two one-acts by Sayam at Birla Academy on October 27, predictably, toe the line of adaptation from exotic sources—a line we may safely associate with Calcutta's little theatre movement as a whole. Whether this reflects snobbery or a genuine search for new themes and idioms—well, that's a different question. Partly it is no doubt due to a dearth of significant new plays in Bengali. But adaptations, if anything, can scarcely fill the dearth as long as these do not go beyond mere imitation or simply fall back on distortion. The malaise that afflicts modern Bengali play writing cannot be kept away from these borrowings either. It seems a truism that if you fail to translate your own experience in original dramatic or any other creative idiom, the odds are that you will not succeed in translating other people's creative expressions in terms of your own experience. This holds equally true of theatrical production of works of an earlier period in our own language or any other.

Of the two plays, the first—*Manusher Mukh* (The Human Face)—is based on O. Henry's story: *The Cop and the Anthem*. Unfortunately, the story loses much of its point in the dramatized version. The many sins committed by the dramatist—not least the liberties taken with all the incidents and characters—dilute and diffuse whatever dramatic intensity the story may have contained in its original form. It would have been much safer to stick to the original plot and development with only such

embroideries as a stage production might need. One does not understand why the playwright should have taken pains to introduce new turns and twists which only help to dissipate the effect he aims at. The weakness of the play comes out particularly in the end which shows the tramp praying to God for strength of mind to enable him to return to a decent life after many unsuccessful attempts to get back to prison to save himself from hunger and cold. This is preceded by a sentimental dream spinning with a street-walker who loves him, has saved some money for their joint happiness in future and holds out the hope of a job for him. These new touches at once strike a false note and do not allow for development of the story with dramatic necessity. Hence the tramp's fate leaves us cold and indifferent, and lacks the element of shock or surprise when he is caught and bundled off to jail.

It is hardly necessary to tell anyone that O. Henry's story turns upon the tramp's desperate attempt to get back into prison to save himself from hunger and cold. One after another the petty crimes he attempts—to shirk payment at a restaurant after a hearty meal, smashing shop-windows, accosting a respectable-looking lady who, to his chagrin, turns out to be a tart, stealing an umbrella from a person who himself picked it up in a hotel and finally disorderly conduct in the street—one by one these offences fail to land him in prison. He is disappointed. Some

dreadful enchantment seems to have made him immune from arrest. Suddenly the flicker of a church light through painted windows and sounds of music inside hold him spell-bound and fastened to the iron fence. Deep within him stir a bitter remorse for his wild and useless existence and a longing for home and settled life, and he resolves to take the job of a driver he was once offered. Just at that moment a cop turns up and he is sent to prison for three months. The bitter irony of the ending with its subdued pathos does not come through in the adaptation, if only because the playwrights slurs it by his unnecessary substitutions.

Technically, the production is competent and uses mimes and other revived novelties of the modern theatre. Both light and decor are appropriate, though the suggestion of the onset of cold weather and its effect on the tramp is absent. The acting is good, but Archana Chatterji's accent does not befit a street-walker in love with a tramp. The tramp's part would have had a better rendering if Pritinath Chaudhuri had not decided to resemble a crazy clown. His hopeless, ne'er-do-well existence on the outer fringe of respectable society, with no real chance but only a flicker of a longing to redeem himself should have been brought out in the performance.

Hing Ting Chhot (A Gibberish), the other play, is based on three Vietnamese stories given by Peter Weiss, the West German playwright, in his book on the cultural life of Vietnam. The production follows *Hatcheo*, a popular theatrical tradition in Vietnam, comparable to our *yatra*, Japanese *kabuki* and Chinese Opera. On its own merits, the production is impressive what with its light, decor or make-up. Acting through stylized gestures and address, sets and costumes of a strange exotic character and the story itself create an atmosphere of a nursery dream-world. The whole thing has been conceived with imagination. Although music and dance form an

essential part of the traditions of folk drama to which the play owes its inspiration, Sayam's production leaves them out.

The story is in the nature of a folk allegory complete with a demoniac King and a corrupt and servile Court. There is a Jester as champion of the poor who are bled by the King and his Court. At his instigation the farmers stop paying rent after a famine, get beaten and revolt. They wreak vengeance on the King by playing broad, country jokes of a rough and practical kind. The King is discomfited and, caught in his own toils drinks poison and dies together with his whole royal household.

The group proposes to put a full length play comprising all the stories given in Peter Weiss's book at Muktagangan on November 17. Attempt should however be made to adapt these tales from abroad to the colour and context of our own *rupkathas* and techniques of a *yatra* production while retaining the elements of *hatcheo*, *kabuki* and Chinese opera. Some of our own folk tales can be transformed along these lines—for a change.

Treasure Hunt

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

ARUNDHATI Devi's exploration into the world of fantasy and adventure in *Padipishir Barmi Baksho*, after her forays into the complex world of teenage romance, should deserve some wild cheer. Cheers, because by virtue of its thematic variety, it breathes a kind of fresh air into the suffocating rut of the average Bengali film of tear-jerking romantic melodrama. But the cheers must be mild because despite the sincerity and the boldness of her attempt, the director is not quite up to the mark in the total execution. The original story by Lila Majumdar is a hilarious account of the frantic hunt for a secret treasure in an old mansion and is

remarkable material for intelligent entertainment on celluloid. The film starts off with a promise of power as the story of how the treasure was brought to the mansion by a lady of the house, a dreadful old harridan, is told in flashbacks. The flashback episode, done in colour, is handled with verve and a refreshing spirit of broad comedy. The operatic stylisation lends a fairy-tale texture to the whole show (I hope some day Arundhati Devi would seriously try her hand at filming folk-operas). But the charm is short-lived and as we move into the present when the boy-hero plunges into the search for the hidden treasure, the film tends to flag. The construction is not at all taut, the gags do not click, the treatment is unfunny, the build-up of suspense is tame, and the acting style is an abortive attempt at stylisation of voice and gestures. The two more flashbacks are there as mere padding for the story, the first one showing the horsey clowning of an England-returned young man is just redundant and the second is an excuse for vulgar entertainment introducing a song-dance sequence by some young men dressed in female attire. The colour photography in the flashback sequences is sub-standard and the technical execution of the optical effects, split-screen techniques, accelerated motion are mostly puerile, though an animated dream sequence showing a dragon guarding the treasure-box and the boy-hero destroying the monster is fairly well done. On the whole, therefore, the film remains as a sad pointer to the lack of imagination and cinematic power of our average film-makers.

Comedy of Horrors

Mash is truly a comedy of horrors. Set in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (the film's title is made up of the four initials) at the back of the area of operations during the Korean War, the film is a rollicking, boisterous, irreverent comedy making fun of war and its perpetrators. Although most of the time blood vir-

tually oozes out of the screen as the surgery is shown in telling detail, the mood of the film is one of gay abandon, a kind of inspired mayhem. But behind this facade of funny moments, there are sometimes touches of sadness and pathos pointing to the futility and wastage of the youthful dreams locked in an army camp. The script is racy and the cameo performances of Donald Sutherland and Elliott Gould as two over-sized Pucks in G.I. uniforms, are lively assets of the film.

Letters

A Dying Culture

Mr Hiten Ghosh's lamentations over the dying Bengali culture (October 14) are those of a typical Bengali intellectual who is a little too elated about his glorious heritage. By which standards is our culture dying? Is it dying because, as Mr Ghosh says, it cannot get into the core of the Ionescos or Albees of today with the deadly efficiency with which our forefathers digested the Shelleys or Miltons of yesterday or day before yesterday? If that is the case, the question should be raised whether our culture was ever living? Or, was it merely feigning life? Was it ever a people's culture, as Mr Ghosh would have us believe?

In a very recent article, speaking about the Santhal Rebellion, Mr Benoy Ghose has made a comment which is very much pertinent to the present content. 'If one looks at the two years, 1855 and 1856, let alone the lengthy history, one wonders whose renaissance it was, who was awakened—the barbarous savage abominable lot of the Santhal villagers and their comrades or the urban middle-class bhadralok and newly educated intelligentsia?' (*Ekshan*, Autumn No. 1972). The educated Bengali has seldom looked into the people outside his narrow area. While an English Shelley can rise up to the occasion of the massacre at Manchester, with his 'Masque

of Anarchy, his supposed counterparts in this colony could only show an extra-human capability of playing the ostrich. Instead of going deep into their own people's life-current, the Bengali educated have from the very beginning sided with the imperialists and found solace in their own cultural superiority. And what was the measure of this superiority? No, it was never the degree of impact produced upon the people. It could not be, because of the very nature of the inception of Bengali culture. Its claim to cultural superiority has as its sole basis a supposed compatibility with European culture. 'The Shelley of Bengal', 'The Scott of Bengal', 'The Garrick of Bengal'—such were the analogical titles conferred on the torch-bearers of Bengali culture by their appreciators. What with its glamour and what with its parasitic character, Bengali culture can aptly be termed an orchid. The few exceptions like *Nil Darpan* or *Jamidar Darpan* merely prove the law.

Not that Mr Hiten Ghosh hasn't noted this. But he should have been bold enough to pose the obvious question: can such a culture be termed a people's culture? For, had he posed this question, the present decay should have appeared to him as a necessary culmination of a long process which, with the culmination, is at last probably coming to an end. The utter baselessness of the Bengali culture is as evident as anything today. And the obvious conclusion one must draw is not that a great culture has fallen on bad days but that the 'inherent alienation of a culture almost totally alienated from its people is ultimately reaching its climax.

A. K. LAHIRI
Calcutta

Calcutta 71

Mrinal Sen has made not only an important but an unforgettable film in spite of some of our dogged aesthetic prejudices. Indeed he has

made all our habitual responses to a work of art look extremely silly and irrelevant. He has compelled his medium to carry a message it has never been known to sustain before in this country.

Calcutta 71 is a shocking film, both in its form and in its content. Those who are repelled by the shocking novelties of its formal aspect are in fact reacting adversely to the blistering horror of its content. With them the continuing need for dope or illusion masquerades as a scandalised sense of aesthetic propriety. Mrinal Sen would have done himself little credit had he tried to present his cruel picture in conventional techniques. In today's context all such conventionalities are sedatives to reconcile us to the facts of life. Sen's art avowedly eschews this conciliatory approach, he intends to shock and rail and badger and harrow us. If the film is a triumph of art it is not in spite but because of his unusual message. Some reviewers in this country have given themselves away by insisting

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that Sen should have confined himself to the three stories in between the first and last sequences which, according to them, are irrelevant extrapolation and serve only to wreck his achievement with the three 'pure' films.

It is interesting that the very things which appear offensive to the purists are just what make the film really great, new and explosive. Mrinal Sen's credit as an artist lies in his capacity to make each of his stories, though separated by years, seem contemporaneous and form an inseparable part of the whole which is instinct with a single theme. It is a wonder how he sustains so much propaganda, so much realism within the framework of art whose object is to distort and create illusion. He has achieved a triumph in combining and integrating pure art and its raw materials, imaginative fiction and day-to-day news, harsh reality and witty burlesque. Those who lament that Sen's preoccupation with his message spoils his art and makes it something equivalent to advertisement or election propaganda are parroting an old cant and do not see how tellingly he uses the techniques of advertisement and political propaganda to press home his point with devastating irony. They miss the whole point of the modern revolution in art. All art is illusion which struggles into being through man's hopes and fears. The problem of the modern artist is the difficulty of making the new 'illusion' acceptable to the generation that has seen the wreck of all hopes and invasion of unprecedented fears. This art must bear the stamp of tortured disillusionment and yet justify itself—which it can do only by refusing to be taken in.

Sen, it seems, never wanted to make three short innocuous films out of three nearly forgotten stories to provide us with pure aesthetic enjoyment of an evening. He reads a new meaning in these stories and seeks to relate them to our contemporary reality. The first part of the film is an obvious fantasy and cari-

ature. The court scene is no more like an actual trial than when seen through a distorting mirror; even its context is absurd. The farcical intent is driven home with deadly thrusts. The proceedings and the background could be true only in Alice's dream-world yet they seem so real and relevant. The imaginary trial is counterpointed by living and frozen images of misery and death, further foolery and a dream-like beauty shattered by gruesome killing of a young man. The concluding burlesque with all its exaggeration is another contrast to the horror of death by starvation, of squalor, disease and degradation. The image of naked force of the power that combines nightmarish horror with funny reliefs of a puppet-show. There is no point in upholding the merits of the three in-between films while ignoring and reviling the superb artistic achievement in creating a powerful visual and aural imagery of the reality around us.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the supreme artistry of the film. The sheer visual impact of life in Calcutta's fetid dens, of shame and degradation, of struggle to snatch a living on the edge of starvation speaks for itself. The grim unrelieved despair of the poor living and dying like animals, and the hypocrisy of the rich are translated in cinematic idiom with deadly economy. There is nothing to relieve the helplessness of the family seeking shelter from rain, or the shame of the mother and her daughters or the precarious existence of the smugglers. There is no getting away from the accusing look and voice of the killed youth or the petrifying stare of a child dying of hunger or the withered limbs and faces of old and young men and women flashing across the screen. No, we have not seen its like in Bengali cinema. It is a film to lead you to an overwhelming question.

If Satyajit Ray has given us the new film with its refined potentialities, Mrinal Sen has made this new idiom the vehicle of a meaning

which is more relevant, more real. Ray's vision is poetic, even romantic, one might say, while Sen brings our film closer to earth and down to the very hell we all live in.

HITEN GHOSH
Calcutta

Mrinal Sen's *Calcutta 71* has come as a pleasant surprise to us particularly at a time when there is uninterrupted gloom among the progressive leftist thinkers. It is a film of great force and originality and Sen depicts with the ruthlessness and objectivity of a Marxist the intolerable poverty of his countrymen, side by side with the brazen-faced hypocrisy of the callous, bloated rich. The first story (by Manik Bandyopadhyay) where Sen delineates the fight of a helpless poverty-ridden family against turbulent Nature is memorable for its unfailing accuracy. It is a tribute to reality itself. This part of the film reminds us of *Pather Panchali*. But Ray's film though great in its own way is poetry of unrelieved sadness while Sen's work rudely disturbs the placidity of our middle-class thinking. It turns futile tear into anger and hatred against the whole system. The unfeeling nature of this system is brought out in the third story of rice smuggler Gouranga—a society that snatches him from the way of decent living and into the violence of injustice; it confirms and completes the process of his dehumanization. The second story is a faithful presentation of those fast-losing middle-class values of which the tradition-sanctified upholders of our country boast so much.

We are no believers of the 'art for art's sake' theory. We want art that is a reflection of reality, an art that inspires by its truthful presentation of reality and does not confuse by its remarkable absurdity. *Calcutta 71* is stimulating in a choking atmosphere where filthy things are going on in the name of art. It shatters the vaneer of the socialistic pretensions of the higher echelons of our society. It calls forth noble thoughts that

give birth to noble actions. We are thrilled to note that fearless grappling with reality particularly at this lean time of Indian cinema when even Ray is busy serving the establishment.

Though it is not free from minor blemishes, its merits are so many that the demerits can easily be ignored. What really counts is that Sen has recovered Indian Cinema from the pit of absurdity and ineffectual sentimentalism and has set it on the road of progressive thinking based on the horrible Indian reality where people share food with street dogs and die like rats on pavements and the rich rolling in luxury quote halcyon phrases of socialism.

BIPLAB GHOSAL
Howrah

Mrinal Sen is probably Bengal's most consistently outspoken film director. Perennial poverty (How long!) is the main concern of his latest work, *Calcutta 71*. His method is not safe because it is new and not well-tryed but the way he has sought to bring about responses is indeed old-fashioned. His accurate observation is occasionally marred by over-emphasis. The film is uneven; taste and restraint are coupled with uneconomical commentary.

The film is curiously structured with several self-contained stories, all quite representative in themselves. This might have been an effective way of depicting India's progression from poverty to pauperism and correspondingly to violent, often anarchic, protest. But we do not see and feel the process ourselves but see merely Mrinal Sen's efforts to make us feel it.

This will be a superficial summary of so noble and ambitious a programme unless one adds that despite loosely assembled stories of different periods lacking unity and development a central concern can be perceived. And this is disturbing. Otherwise why such a review in the most reactionary newspaper?

PROBODH CHANDRA DUTTA
Calcutta

For How Long?

The conspiracy case numbered FRC 1 and 2 of 1971, on the file of the Special Magistrate, Visakhapatnam is, it is learnt, being transferred to Hyderabad. Among the accused as many as 63 belong to Srikakulam District, 6 to Visakhapatnam and 3 to the State of Orissa. Thus the total number of accused belonging to places in and around Visakhapatnam is 72. Since a majority of them belong to the poor Girijan community, it would be impossible for their relatives to go all the way to Hyderabad and see the accused.

A number of people involved in the Naxalite Conspiracy Case and other Naxalite cases have been kept in jail without trial for more than two to three years. Several cases are still in the enquiry stage, even though the offences were registered as long back as 1968-69.

Other cases committed to the Sessions of Srikakulam are under transfer to the Addl. Sessions Court of Visakhapatnam, and the Addl. Sessions Court has already posted cases up to April, 1973. There is no likelihood of the trial starting immediately. This means the accused, innocent before the law as long as proved otherwise, will have to remain in jail for more than three years. A majority of the accused are denied bail on one count or the other. There is no specific provision in the Criminal Procedure Code regarding granting of bail to an accused kept in jail for more than 3 years, without trial.

We therefore demand a change in the Criminal Procedure Code and the Criminal rules of practice which are mostly a heritage of the British rule.

The poor among the accused should also be given a counsel of his own choice or a senior advocate of the courts wherever the cases are pending. The counsel should get as much as the Public Prosecutor gets.

Since a number of the accused in these cases are destitute Harijans and Girijans they are not in a position to acquire copies of the depositions.

These should be supplied free.

Though most cases are of a political nature, the families of the accused are denied maintenance allowance. Destitute families of the accused should immediately be paid such allowance.

The Naxalite Conspiracy cases and other Naxalite cases are political cases and the first of their nature after 1947. None of the accused acted for personal gains. They have set before the nation an example in selfless service to the people even at the risk of their lives.

We therefore appeal to all democratic parties, prominent individuals and the public to mobilize support for the acceptance of the above demands.

Convenor.

CIVIL LIBERTIES COMMITTEE
4-7-785, Esamia Bazar, Hyderabad

Confrontation

Apropos the article of Mr R. P. Mullick (September 2) and the rejoinder to it from Mr Shyam Sunder Gupta (letters September 23), I do not find any relevance of the off-tangent remarks/comments of Mr Gupta concerning the main issue of the article—that there has been and there still exists, a confrontation between the Central Government (plus the ruling party of which it is the instrument) and the majority of the population of West Bengal. Your correspondent has not stated any other contradiction between class forces different from the one which has brought about this confrontation. What he objects to is that Mr Mullick, an "intellectual sycophant of the left establishment", has described the CP-ML's emergence as part of the Congress strategy of removing the mass-bases of people's struggles. But in the article, the entire stress is on the role played by the lackeys, the stooges and the mercenaries of the establishment, not left but pre-eminently right and reactionary who have masqueraded as cadres and supporters of all the

left parties committed to social revolution, including the CPI(ML).

As to the accuracy of figures relating to the dead among cadres, supporters, and sympathisers, the probability of error is there, but this can be minimised.

It is time we learned to distinguish between the real leftist party cadres and the fake; and also, to realise

that there is a vast common ground between the CPI(M) and CPI(ML) cadres and workers for jointly undertaking revolutionary class and mass struggles for people's liberation. The supposed difference between open and secret tactics of such struggles does not exist.

SOMNATH
Lucknow

ahead with her massive military plan. The future of Indochina is again uncertain. Of course Mr Kissinger is going to fly many times to sort out great-power complications; Mr Nixon is still the overlord who can do whatever he likes. It is this conviction that he can get away with anything that made the Americans vote for him. It was perhaps, not his visits to Peking and Moscow but his mining of North Vietnam harbours and the horror bombing that has gone on, even his duplicity on the dates mentioned by Hanoi that impressed his people.

For this state of affairs, for the way the USA has behaved ever since the mid-fifties, the initial and primary responsibility lies with the Soviet Union. The Russians after Stalin sought accommodation and understanding with the Americans, at the cost of China and other revolutionary forces. The outcome on November 7—a historic date for revolution—has been the triumph of reaction.

Comment

That Man Again

By re-electing Mr Nixon the Americans have voted, not for peace in Indochina, but for electronic wars in which machines would do mass-killing while the men would be safe. They have voted for gruesome regional wars in which coloured people would be encouraged to fight each other. Of course they have not voted for world war, because in such a war their own lives and property would be in great danger this

time, unlike in the past when the American ruling classes had their homes untouched while they minted money. It is better to have nice little wars thousands of miles away. The American majority is a nasty animal; the minority is fine but ineffectual.

Mr Nixon's victory does not make the world a safer place. The reactionary forces all over are crooning with confidence; Japan will go

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