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THE GREAT APATHY

THE defeat of the Congress in four by-elections in Maharashtra has understandably evoked divergent reactions in different political parties. The CPI is elated at the victory of Chairman Dange's daughter in Bombay Central parliamentary constituency; its joy seems to be shared by the progressives in the Congress who regard the defeat of the Jana Sangh in the constituency as of greater import than their own party's defeat. The Congress President has said something whose plain meaning seems to be that his party was defeated because of an impression that it had forged an alliance with the Shiv Sena which it had not. Neither Rajni Patel nor Bal Thackeray bears him out; and reports of who supported the Congress for what remain uncontradicted. Who takes the Congress President seriously, though? The Prime Minister alone speaks for the party, and she has prophesied that the Maharashtra results will not affect the Uttar Pradesh elections. Suspicious cocksureness. The Jana Sangh is convinced that the Indira wave is out and an anti-Congress wave is in; so a glorious future waits for the Sangh. The GPM which supported the CPI in Bombay Central without withdrawing the charge of tailism against the CPI is looking forward to a left and democratic front, including the CPI and excluding the Congress.

Congress minds are naturally exercised over the reasons for the defeat. Various explanations have been offered; the only explanation that one misses is that the poll was taken in the four constituencies on a day which was inauspicious for the Congress. The most popular theory is that the ruling party has been reprimanded the Bombay Central for its unprincipled alliance with the Shiv Sena. The Congress has never been a stickler for principles, and its alliances have always been forged with an eye to vote-catching. The latest of its alliances is the agreement on division of seats in the Pondicherry Assembly elections in which it has teamed up with the Congress (O) against, among other parties, the CPI with which it is seeking an electoral understanding in Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. If the unprincipled alliance with the Shiv Sena was the reason for the Congress debacle in Bombay Central, the ruling party would not have been defeated in Ramtek Parliamentary constituency or in Sawantwadi and Sangola Assembly constituencies.

The false cry has been raised merely to divert attention from the real reason of the defeat which is the absolute failure of the Congress to ensure the bare necessities of life at reasonable prices and its brazen indifference to the consequent hardship to the people.

The Maharashtra by-elections, however morale-boosting for the Opposition parties, carry a lesson for them also. Candidates of four different non-Congress parties have been returned from as many constituencies, though the options were not so limited. The emergence of the Jana Sangh as the second party in Bombay Central is also a pointer. The people are disgusted with the Congress and determined to throw it out; but they do not have an alternative in sight. Their anger is being dissipated through negative

voting; it is not being given a positive orientation for which the Opposition parties themselves are to blame. The extraordinarily low polling in Bombay Central cannot be ascribed solely to the poll boycott called by the Dalit Panther whose influence is limited to the Scheduled Castes. Many more people have refrained from voting because they saw no point in voting for parties in which they have no confidence. The bulk of the voters in Bombay Central belong to this category. By their abstention they have demonstrated their loss of faith in parties that promise to bring them succour through the parliamentary game based on elections. The debate over how and why the minority votes were split is hypocritical in the context of this great apathy.

Merely Political!

Mr Siddhartha Ray has begun a war against the psychology of shortages. Evidently, he does not believe that the country is suffering from an acute bout of shortages, artificial, engineered or genuine; as he sees it, the country is suffering from an illusion of shortages, and therefore all that is needed is an extensive propaganda that the Government will not tolerate the psychology. It does not matter whether rice is procured or not; the thing that is of importance is the announcement that there will be dehoarding—an announcement we have been hearing for the last fortnight. We will perhaps be told in a few days not to speak of shortages any more.

But how long can such clowning go on? The jute workers of the State, in spite of their allegiance to the Congress, have joined hands with their leftist-affiliated co-workers and are on strike since January 14. The industry signed an agreement with the obliging trade unions, which to their utter surprise find the supporters paying no heed to their counsel.

Building, may have his own philosophy and therefore fails to understand why the jute workers have rebelled. Such failure is not new, of course.

In a way, the Siddhartha Ray is right. Politics has of course no command. But not in the sense of talk of politics—politics as aocracy. Those who know that there are shortages, who have all the power to remove the shortages—for all, the present shortages are artificial—and yet would not, are alloting out their own politics. With the political power to wield, they would not have been able to be suckers as they are. Look at ministers and legislative members who are making money through politics. In spite of Mrs Gandhi, we are not yet in a socialist State, and where only economics and politics acquires priority. And if Congresswallas can use their politics with impunity, why should the politics of others be considered as social?

That is not to say, however, that the jute workers are now in a political battle. But the reality must be theirs as well that politics has to take command if they want to regain dignity not in a limited sphere but for the workers of the country as a whole.

Esso Bows Out

It's all very fine that another deluge of foreign capital has now fallen to the onward march of India's socialist economy. And Indians must feel proud and happy that they are now own as much as 74 per cent of Esso, the American oil company which for all these years, right under the Government's nose, was taking away millions and millions of profits from the country. More important, they must now shed all their lurking and highly obnoxious suspicion that the authorities were not doing enough to meet their requirements of food, cloth, salt, baby food, butter, kerosene, etc. Unless the Government

Congress Trade Unions

The Congress in-fighting on its trade union front has been causing great damage to the sick economy of West Bengal. The INTUC chief, Mr P. C. Bhagwati, at a meeting with the West Bengal Chief Minister recently, disclosed that 24 workers and grade unionists were killed and 79,000 workers lost wages for 271 days during the last one year because of inter-union fights among the Congress factions. Besides, seven major industrial units declared a lock-out and over Rs. 37 crores of production was lost during the same period. Mr Bhagwati's figures, if anything, are likely to err on the low side. Besides, he has not referred to certain other effects of the fallout from Congress in-fighting in the trade unions. For example, he has not mentioned the profits, material and political, which the employers, particularly the big ones, are reaping from this. Factory owners in West Bengal have generally stopped making new investments for development. Many of them are fleecing their factories for quick profit which they invest in more lucrative "projects". Inter-union fights among the Congress factions are generally most intense in such factories. The employers encourage the in-fighting to declare closure on the plea that their units are "sick". Then they wangle big subsidies from the Government for their rehabilitation. The in-fighting is also used by the employers to delay or avoid acceptance of the workers' demands. Another effect has been the recruitment of anti-socials in the industrial units. For example, one Congress faction forced a factory in Durgapur to recruit 200 of its supporters. In reply, the rival faction pushed in about an equal number of its supporters in a neighbouring factory. Most of these men were raw, political hoodlums. Being political recruits they were protected and were under no compulsion to qualify for their jobs and went on

For shortage of newsprint we are skipping the February 2 issue of *Frontier*. Our next issue, therefore, will be that of February 9.

drawing their wages without adding much to the factories' output. An almost similar situation developed in the West Bengal State Electricity Board where a large number of recruits were pushed in by the rival factions of the Congress-dominated trade union, INTUC. Mr Bhagwati has not computed the political and economic losses following from these and similar other aspects of the Congress in-fighting. The worst part of it is that senior Congress leaders are refusing to squarely face this danger. Some are avoiding a confrontation in the hope that they could remain in their seats of power by balancing the rival factions. Others are simply egging on the factions. When Mr Bhagwati requested the State Chief Minister to use his influence to discipline the Lakshmi Kanto Bose faction which has set up the NLCC as a rival to the INTUC, the Chief Minister is reported to have advised the INTUC chief to disband his State Committee and in its place form an ad-hoc committee including representatives of both the INTUC and NLCC. It is reported that L. K. Bose and his group are getting open encouragement in their factional activities from no less a person than one of the general secretaries of the AICC. All attempts during the last one and half years to unify the warring Congress TU factions in West Bengal ended in smoke and if the current happenings in the State are any indication, the in-fighting will be further aggravated resulting in more serious damage to the already stagnant economy of the State.

... serious about the welfare of the... it would not have certainly... Esso by buying up 74 per... of its shares which, in fact, it... been pressured to sell as New... Delhi has intensified the crunch. So... Uttar Pradesh and other State... tions around, anyone having the... doubts about the populist... lides of the men and women... the country should feel... assured that his future is... safe, impeccably socialist hands... questions such as whether Esso... would have further come down or... whether it could have been nationa... outright must not be allowed... to detract from the historical move... has now been taken. Just think... a Government that can do... a thing to the mighty Esso—... over 74 per cent of it now and... it agree to a total takeover... years hence—must be able to... of our own tycoons, not to... of the petty blackmarketeers... and boarders and jotedars, even with... having an eyelid. So we must... lose patience. If in the mean... some people die of starvation... malnutrition—and hardly any... finds a job, that cannot be... The great millennium is... And think of Esso's magnanimity... It could feel that the Indian... public wants that it must cease to... an entirely foreign entity and that... must also conform to the ground... Maybe it could sense that... the longer it delays the deal, the... weaker its bargaining power becomes... Maybe it could feel that it stood very... chance of expanding its refin... capacity and that the fabulous... profit it was making from the sale... of refined petroleum products was... under threat. But these are... important. What is, is the... The Arabs have now taken... away the great fun it was to be in the... oil business. And so this is the time... to leave India—and leave India in... the lurch. Certainly the other two... foreign oil companies will also not... be found wanting in rising to the oc... sion.

JANUARY 26, 1974

JANUARY 26, 1974

Rig One, Rig All

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

PERHAPS the Prime Minister was well advised, on the basis of authentic intelligence reports, not to visit Bombay the day after the "protest poll" which cost the ruling party all the four contests in Maharashtra. If anything, she would have had to go from the airport to town by helicopter as Mr Robert McNamara once had to do in Calcutta or Mrs Gandhi herself had to do in West Bengal. The fact that she had to abandon her meeting in Nagpur on January 2 and could not visit Bombay to plan lends credence to reports that she had been advised to drastically curtail her tours outside Uttar Pradesh for the time being and to rely as much as possible on the whirley bird, avoiding surface transport. This is something she did not know of, even at the height of anti-Congressism in 1967.

The by-election pointers are unmistakable. *Pravda* might see the defeat of right reaction in Bombay Central-North where the Congress was pushed to the third place and the CPI won. In the *Pravda* eye-view everyone except Mrs Rosa Deshpande a reactionary because the Congress had allied with the Shiv Sena clandestinely or openly. But in Nagpur, the CPI candidate lost his deposit and the Congress trailed by 1,37,000-odd votes, against a Mahavidharba separatist candidate.

Beginning with Mr Madhu Limaye's victory in Banka the pattern has been clear. Multiplicity of candidates against the Congress had hardly given the Congress the usual advantage. The voters have always decided as to who is the potential winner against the Congress and polarised votes in his favour. Sabarkantha, Mhow, Bombay, Nagpur (Ramtek), Swantwadi—all have the same lesson to offer. It is al-

most always a negative vote swelling the support the potential winner already has. The multiplier might not operate in Mrs Gandhi's favour in Uttar Pradesh or Orissa this time. Less than 30 per cent of the polled votes, the chances are that the multiplier would operate against the Congress which means it will get a smaller proportion of seats in relation to the proportion of votes it polls.

Orissa has perhaps been written off but how does one win the Uttar Pradesh elections for Mrs Gandhi? New Delhi is thick with reports that wizard who managed the West Bengal poll in 1972 (a retired police official) has been put in charge of the job in Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. "Unless Mrs Gandhi is sure of winning Uttar Pradesh, she would not have decided on the poll", is the fatalistic remark one hears in New Delhi these days. The mystique includes the unreasoned belief that the Congress will win it come what may. Irrespective of the votes polled?

The CPI's Bombay victory gave it a new leverage when the Uttar Pradesh lists were being finalised and the party could wrest 25 seats in the deal. The bogey of a rightist takeover in Uttar Pradesh is being conjured up by the CPI for the consumption of the faithfuls inside but this is a clear sign of nervousness. Uttar Pradesh, the CPI also says, is the social and political base of right reaction. So the Congress has to be strengthened.

In its preoccupation with Uttar Pradesh, everything else seems to have been shelved by the Government leadership. The food situation is deteriorating despite a bumper kharif harvest and the bounty of Soviet loan wheat rotting uncleared at the ports. The new

wave of industrial unrest, gripping the public sector undertakings mainly, is being met with a tough line. There seems to be a differentiation policy. Anything involving the public sector would be pursued ruthlessly. If it is the private sector, a little manoeuvrability will be allowed to the trade union leaders. Mr K. V. Raghunatha Reddy has emerged as the patron saint of the public sector and all though he was told about the Indian Airlines trouble and Air Marshal Lal had a hand to try his tough line.

The lock-out weapon would be used with effect whenever a public sector undertaking would run into trouble, according to observers. There is a clear pattern to the move again.

The Home Ministry is taking sudden interest in the food problem because law and order is much to do with empty stomachs. Mr Dikshit has been away from the spotlight for quite some time and Dr S. D. Sharma does not talk of sinister Opposition conspiracies behind the wave of unrest. A people's approach is evident. The charge against the Opposition lack credibility these days and it is always to let the Central Reserve Police handle things for the State governments. The present wave of disturbances had been predicted and the Government had been forewarned. Therefore the mini-general election next month was ill-timed from the point of view of Congress requirements. The unrest in the rest of the country cannot be allowed to extend to Uttar Pradesh and Orissa and rout in a State like Uttar Pradesh would mean the collapse of the shaky Congress governments in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. It could be worse, a rudderless drive towards new authoritarianism at the Centre.

January 20, 1974

JANUARY 26, 1974

Bangladesh And The Coming Crisis—I

HISTORICUS

THIS article was written on the eve of what will either be a "slowdown" or "backdown" in Dacca. On December 30 at the JSD rally to be held in Dacca during 1973 the Jatiyo Samajik Dal (JSD—The National Socialist Party) called for demonstrations, gherrao, and strikes against the Awami League Government. More than 100,000 people attended JSD's Paltan meeting, January 20 to mark the beginning of the new government. Already beleaguered by months of armed attacks against police outposts by underground groups and assassinations of leading Awami Leaguers, Mujib's Government is now faced with an above ground party (JSD) calling for armed insurrection.

At the December 30 meeting JSD's leadership declared that January 20 would be marked by a massive people's "Resistance Day". However, on January 13 the Government invoked Sec. 144 and banned all meetings and procession for twenty-one days. This was a direct challenge to JSD by the Awami League. Major M. A. Jalil, President of JSD, responded with his own ultimatum. The Government, he said, had 90 days in which to revoke the order.

At the time of writing that is about things stand. There are also reports of a large number of Raksh Bahini and Bangladesh Army units heading into Dacca to begin patrols. They have already started their intensive cordoning operations in the city to search for weapons and "suspects". (That catch-all phrase for the non-Awami League section of humanity.)

The next few days will tell whether or not JSD goes ahead with plans for the "Resistance Day" meeting. If it does, it will confront the full armed power of "Mujibbad". If it does not, matters will have only been postponed.

In India it is now imperative for progressive forces to awaken to developments in Bangladesh. The events of 1971 caught too many off guard and the results of the ensuing disarray still linger not only in the prisons of West Bengal and other States, but in the political impotence of the present period.

The crucial question being asked by anti-Awami League elements in Bangladesh is what action will India take if there is an armed upsurge against the Awami League regime. Can New Delhi afford or allow a potentially hostile party to establish itself in state power in Dacca? If such a situation develops or if a new civil war breaks out, how much can opposition to the Congress party within India be relied upon to check any interventionist impulses from New Delhi?

In this regard the current move of anti-Indian sentiment in Bangladesh must be correctly interpreted. The explanations emanating from official circles dismiss the trend as nothing more than zealous stirring up of communal feelings. Alternatively "collaborationist" or "pro-Pakistani" remnants are identified with the increase. Both positions, however, ignore a number of concrete factors.

Smuggling

Smuggling has become big business along the entire Indo-Bangladesh border. The main commodities going out of Bangladesh appear to be jute and rice. The official exchange rate between the rupee and the taka is one to one, but in the border areas one rupee commands two takas. This creates enormous price differentials in the border areas with the dominant drawing power in favour of India.

Officials in Dacca some weeks ago were a bit hard pressed to explain how India had suddenly become a

major exporter of raw jute. Prior to 1971 India was deficient in raw jute for its own mills. Now not only is there a sufficient supply to run Calcutta area mills at full capacity and on triple shifts but India this year will export 500,000 bales of raw jute. New Delhi's claim of a large bumper crop is not generally believed in Dacca.

Jute exports make up 83% of Bangladesh's foreign exchange earnings. With this export-earner going out through Calcutta instead of through Chalna and Chitragong ports, the responsibility for lack of foreign exchanges and for shortages in Bangladesh markets is being laid at the feet of India.

Rice is another item. A confidential UN study in Dacca claims that in the period following independence more than 50% of the rice crop in the border districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur were smuggled across the border. UN food-grains had to be shipped into the districts to make up for "food shortages". Rice which sold at 40 taka a maund in 1971 in Dacca now sells at 140 taka. While prices may have doubled on Calcutta's black market, the increase has been three to four times in Dacca. Again India is receiving the blame with some good reason.

But to say India is solely responsible for the current situation would be to draw too simple a picture. A major reason for the rapid deterioration in the position of the Awami League is the identification of many of its figures in smuggling and other corrupt operations. Mujib's brother, Sheik Nazir, is reliably reported to be a main operator in the Khulna sector. Too many fortunes have been made overnight by "Mujibists" to make the fourth pillar of "Mujibism" (socialism) sound very convincing.

A final note may be added to the problem of the illegal border trade. The distinction between official and illegal trade is a difference that is difficult to clearly demarcate. One criterion would be to identify com-

modities which are being purchased at official rates of monetary exchange—meaning at the rate of one taka to one rupee. Given conditions along the border, there is no way to measure this form of exchange. However, it can be safely said that trade taking place at the official rate of exchange is not a very high proportion.

Another aspect of the black market rate of exchange between the two currencies is that a large inflow of raw jute and other items from Bangladesh would tend to drive up the value of the taka relative to the rupee. What then is holding its value down at such a low level? (Approximately two taka for one rupee.) The answer is the current transfer of capital from Bangladesh. This comes from two principal sources. The affluent section of the Bangladesh middle class has now adopted the practice of coming to Calcutta to do its shopping for durable goods. The second and probably most important element is the current transfer of funds by "nouveau riche" elements in particular into foreign bank accounts.

In late December the Dacca daily *Ittefaq* published an item saying that Radio Australia had broadcast a report alleging that some unspecified leaders of Bangladesh had deposited \$320 million dollars in foreign banks. Within a week both the Australian High Commission and Radio Australia denied that any such report had been broadcast. However, what is politically important is that the report was widely accepted as truth in Dacca. The purported \$320 million figure is undoubtedly too high a figure. On the other hand, whatever the real one is, it is not a small amount.

A new grouping, formerly not a significant element in the bourgeoisie of East Bengal, has for the moment achieved a politically dominant position. There is a characteristic of merchant capitalism in its behaviour. Its economic practice is based in smuggling, black-marketing, and speculation. It is

increasingly coming into conflict not only with the labouring classes whose declining condition it is responsible for, but also with more traditional business circles. This latter group, which is rooted more in what may be called 'productive capital', is on the political "outs" at present in Dacca. It feels that the "untrained, the uneducated, and petty opportunists" are in the real control of the economy (as opposed to theoretical control of the economy, i.e. attempted 'plannings' in the current situation) and are thereby ruining the country. They fear this can only

threaten their own class position in the long run.

Bangladesh may be on the eve of a major upsurge. Whether it will take a 'right' or 'left' form is not yet clear. It is also crucial to understand the roles foreign powers are playing and will play. In particular India, the USSR, and the US must be watched. India's position has been only partially treated in this section. These other questions will be examined in greater detail in a future instalment.

January 18, 1971

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The Dalit Panthers

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

IN a space of two weeks the scheduled castes in Central Bombay had had a full taste of the Indian form of democracy, first in the organised violence against them with the open connivance of the police and, then, in the election campaigning where the political parties, including the CPI and the CPI(M), urged them to vote so that the same democratic system does not fall apart. Apparently the Marjams refused to be taken in by these parties, at least on this occasion, as the poor poll turn-out shows. Evidently, this has harmed the ruling party's interest most. Their defeat can be attributed mainly to this factor. The soaring prices did the rest.

The incidents in Bombay during the last two weeks have revealed how the Indian political system operates. It shows clearly that the Indian ruling class has attained some degree of maturity in dealing with its enemies; it can single out the source of its potential danger and strike it at will. On January 2 this year, when the left parties called for a Maharashtra bandh, the Government acted with measured indulgence. Though elaborate police arrangements were made throughout the State, active opposition was not on the cards. But it was different with the Dalit Panthers—a militant organisation of the scheduled castes—campaigning for the boycotting of elections.

On January 5 the Dalit Panthers' meeting at Worli in Central Bombay was disrupted and their leader, Raja Dhale, was arrested. Aggrieved, the Dalit Panthers organised a procession to protest against the police excesses on January 10. The procession was lathi-charged and in the resultant confusion on Panther Bhugwati Ramji, Jadhav—was killed. Newspapers, generally faithful to the police, made it clear

enough that the procession was peaceful throughout. Reporting on the incident *The Times of India* has this to say:

"The march from Deorukhkar Chowk at Naigaum was peaceful till it reached the Parel junction when stones were hurled from the buildings on the Panthers and the police arrested four of their leaders. Eye-witness said police beat up the youths mercilessly. This reporter saw the police dragging some of the Panthers to the van by their hair; some were held by two policemen while the other constables beat them with lathis."

Till date the Dalit Panthers is a fledgling organisation of neo-Buddhists with no political programme. Their activities have been confined to violent criticism of the present caste-ridden, exploitative system and total rejection of all it stands for. Naturally such intransigence rattles the authorities and this was reflected in their sharp reaction to the Dalit Panthers' anti-poll agitation.

Compared to this, what happened during the Maharashtra Bandh on January 2 appears tame. Let us ignore the earlier Bombay bandh on December 18 called by the Shiv Sena to protest against the alleged atrocities by the Kannadigas against the Maharashtrians in Belgaum. With the Shiv Sainiks, blessed by the Congress, hunting out the violators the bandh success was foretold. The situation was, however, somewhat different in the left-sponsored bandh on January 2, at least so it was thought to be. But the outcome was hardly different.

If traffic dislocation or non-attendance in offices is the index of a successful bandh, then the left parties can congratulate themselves for what they achieved on that day. Or was it so? To a competent leadership a strike can be a sharp insurrectionary weapon, as was shown by the Bolsheviks in the pre-revolutionary Russia or by the Chinese in Shanghai in the 1920s. In the hands of the Indian left leadership, however, it has been reduced to a harm-

less instrument of protest that the ruling class has accepted as an integral part of the system. In Maharashtra this was clearly evident in the last bandh. In the meeting prior to the bandh day the opposition leaders raised a concerted voice against the failings of the present government and complained about the maltreatment that their parties suffered at the hands of the government. None of them, however, could put forward any viable political alternative or tell the people of the ultimate aim of such a bandh. Their charter of demands concentrates only on economic issues like rising prices or better rations. Even the present struggle of the Bombay textile workers was relegated to a minor position and allowed to be forgotten quietly. But in spite of all these, the strike was a success which was a tribute to the people's spontaneous outburst against the ruling party.

Unlike the bandh in July, it is the rising anti-government sentiment throughout the State that deterred the State Government from thwarting this bandh. But the Dalit Panthers' agitation poses a direct threat to the system which the government cannot take lying down.

January 14, 1974

Statement

A statement issued by the Association for Defence of Democratic Rights, Bombay, says:

Since Saturday, January 5, 1974, Bombay city has witnessed a series of clashes and violent incidents, the principal victims of which have been members of the Dalit Panthers, an organisation of scheduled castes. On January 5 a meeting called by the Dalit Panthers at Ambedkar Maidan in Worli was attacked with stones, following which the police made a lathi-charge on the participants in the meeting and arrested 19 persons, including Raja Dhale, Dalit Panther leader and Marathi writer. The next day there was daylong violence in the predominantly scheduled caste BDD chawls, close to the venue

of the previous day's meeting. Newspaper reports suggest that the police behaved in a partisan manner, beating up and arresting a large number of scheduled caste persons, while taking virtually no action against those hurling stones at the scheduled castes. Worse, at least one newspaper report has charged the police with actually throwing stones at the scheduled caste tenements.

By Monday evening the number of scheduled caste injured was nearly 200 and of those arrested well over 100. But the worst attack on the Dalit Panthers came on Thursday, January 10, when they organised a procession to protest against the partisan attitude of the police. Though the procession was attacked with stones at numerous points, the leaders of the Dalit Panthers successfully restrained the processionists from retaliating—till the police arrested the four most important leaders and followed it up with a lathi-charge. Eye-witness accounts suggest that the police beat up the Dalit youths mercilessly. According to the reporter of the *Times of India*, the police dragged some of the Panthers to the police van by their hair; others were held by policemen while other constables beat them with lathis. Some of the youths were hit with rifle butts as the policemen rained abuses on them. Before the procession was finally broken up, Bhagwat Jadhav, a Dalit Panther youth, had been killed and some 40 injured and another 100 arrested.

The determination of the police to put down the Dalit Panthers, which went far beyond the requirements of maintenance of law and order, was also reflected in their action in rearresting Raja Dhale immediately after he had been released on bail on court orders on January 10. Meanwhile, the clashes at BDD chawls are continuing.

Official spokesmen lose no opportunity to affirm the Government's concern over atrocities committed against the scheduled castes by the upper castes and its determination

to put an end to them. But the events of the last week in Bombay city show that the Government's sympathy and solicitousness for the scheduled castes are available only so long as they meekly accept their exploited status; once they begin to organise themselves to fight exploitation the full force of the Government's repressive powers is turned against them.

According to the Union Home Ministry's own statistics, cases of atrocities on the scheduled castes rose from an average of 177 per month in 1971 to 199 per month in 1972 and 231 per month in the first eight months of 1973. These are very partial statistics; they relate to only six of the 21 States and refer to reported cases only which are a small fraction of the actual number of cases of atrocities on the scheduled castes. The increase in the incidence of violence directed against them, indicated by these figures, can hardly strengthen the scheduled castes' confidence in the Government's willingness and ability to protect them. In the circumstances, the only recourse left to them is to organise themselves politically. This is what the Dalit Panthers are trying to do. If the Government is sincere in its expressions of concern for the plight of the scheduled castes, the efforts of the Dalit Panthers should receive its support and encouragement instead of being met with police repression.

The Association for Defence of Democratic Rights demands that

(1) The Government take steps immediately to remove the atmosphere of terror against the scheduled castes in general, and the Dalit Panthers in particular, created by the events of the last week by taking action against those, policemen and others, responsible for the attacks on the Dalit Panthers.

(2) The Government withdraw the charges against the Dalit Panthers arrested on trivial and flimsy grounds—particularly Raja Dhale, Namdeo Dhasal, Bhai Sangare, J. V. Pawar

and Latif Khatik—and they be released forthwith.

(3) The Government respect the democratic rights of the Dalit Panthers to freely function as a political organisation.

(4) The Government immediately order a judicial enquiry into the week's clashes and violent incidents, especially into the alleged paralytic behaviour of the police.

January 12 1973

The Wretched Of India

S. ANAND

INSTANCES of brutal treatment of the untouchables in India's villages are becoming more and more frequent. For the most trivial reasons, and even for no reason whatsoever, their folk are tortured and their women raped by Hindus of the upper castes with the connivance—and in many cases the active assistance—of the local police. Not even are their children spared—42 Harijan men, women and children were burnt alive by the mirasdars (landlords) of the village of Kidvanmani in Tamil Nadu on Christmas night, 1968. The eight landlords who were implicated in this horrendous crime were absolved of all charges and acquitted, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In releasing the mirasdars the Madras High Court judges commented that they found it difficult to believe that such rich mirasdars, one of whom even owned a car, would personally commit such a heinous crime. "They would be more likely to play safe, unlike desperate hungry labourers" (sic). "One would rather expect that the mirasdars, keeping themselves in the background, would send their servants to commit the several offences..." (sic).

Even in our towns and cities the untouchables are treated most deplorably. The sweepers, the 'scavenger'

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come from their members. Despite numerous measures of legislation enacted by our bourgeois Parliament and despite official statements to the contrary from our so-called 'democratic government', their lot has improved very little, if at all, over the centuries. To understand their position in the society of today it would be necessary to delve a little into the social philosophy of caste.

The main features of Hindu society ruled by the philosophy of caste are:¹

1. Segmental division of society.
 2. Hierarchy. 3. Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse. 4. Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections. 5. Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation. 6. Restrictions on marriage.

All the important literary accounts of aspects of caste centre around the four orders of Hindu society—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. In the *Rigveda*, the first three castes are frequently mentioned. The Brahmins and Kshatriyas were representatives of the priests and warriors respectively. It is only later that reference is made to four castes originating from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the creator—the obvious implication to draw from the position of the body being the hierarchical status and importance of the respective caste (i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra).

A caste also stands for a certain amount of cultural homogeneity.² Even today a majority of Indians (including Hindus, Christians and Muslims) do not consider caste to be an evil. Caste is deeply entrenched in our political and social life. A look at the State legislatures and assemblies shows the principle of representation for each caste being followed. In States like Bihar, U.P., Haryana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu one finds even sub-castes and minor castes fighting to be represented in the ministries. It is obvious that more resolutions and laws are worse than useless as they lead us to believe that we are really doing some-

thing" (about the oppressive influence of caste on Indian society). "Caste is an institution of prodigious strength and it will take a lot of beating before it will die".³

While the untouchables are supposed to exist only outside the caste system, there is strong reason to believe that they are the Shudras referred to in ancient texts.⁴ In the *Rigveda* itself, they are mentioned only once. The Shudras represented domestic servants approximating very nearly to the position of slaves. The Shudra is described as 'the servant of another' to be 'expelled at will'. In later Vedic literature he is described as being of dark colour—the first strong connotation of racialism. Vedic texts are ascribed to the 'fair-pigmented' Aryans, and hence it is likely that the Shudras came from amongst the darker Dravidian races.

The four main castes are very nearly exclusive units, but the upward or downward movement of individuals from one caste to another was not altogether precluded.⁵ While the first three varnas (or castes) have been recognized insofar as religious and ritualistic life is concerned, the Shudra has been systematically debarred from following the religious practices of the Aryans. Brahmins and Kshatriyas were considered to be the two important orders of Hindu society. The Vaishya was spoken of as 'the taxable group' member, and the Shudras (totally) excluded from any purview and denied all justice. The duties of the first three castes have been elaborated in Vedic literature but the Shudra was left much to himself at least as far as his internal affairs were concerned. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are called 'dvijas' (twice-born) because they go through an initiation ceremony symbolic of rebirth. This 'privilege' was denied the Shudra who is called 'ekajati' (once-born).

It is revealing to note the way Shudras have been regarded by venerated sages and in Hindu mythology. Vasistha declared the Shudra to be

'a burial ground'. The Vedas were not to be recited in his presence. No advice was to be given him, nor the remnants of offerings to gods. He was to wear the discarded garments of other castes and eat the food left over from their meals. The Shudra was to be denied contact with the holy laws of the Hindus and he was not allowed to do penance or practise meditation. Even 'virtuous' Rama is said to have killed a Shudra who was practising austerities. The great Buddha exhorted a person to 'cast off' his father if he either sacrificed with the money given by a Shudra or officiated at a sacrifice in a Shudra's abode. It is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that the Shudra could have no absolute property because his wealth was liable to be expropriated by his master at will. On the false image most people have regarding the casteless image of Buddhism, Prof. Ghurye comments:⁶ "...in the matter of caste-restrictions the preachings and actions of Buddha had only a general liberalizing effect". "He (the Buddha) does not seem to have started with the idea of abolishing caste distinction, or do his actions, as described in the Jataka stories, demonstrate an utter indifference to the accident of birth; much less do they evince any conscious effort to annihilate caste." The Shudra was truly treated as the scum of the earth. He was to receive severe punishment if he had the cheek to assume a position of equality with the twice-born man. One caught committing adultery with women of the first three castes was slated for capital punishment or burnt alive. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were barred from travelling in the company of Shudras as the latter were thought to impart pollution by contact.

"Harijans"

The British started the policy of giving special privileges and preferences to backward classes but this superficial attempt to combat the ostracisation they were subjected to did not meet with much success.

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Western contact did not successfully tackle old ideas about untouchability. The problem of eradicating untouchability from Indian society was made a national one by Gandhi. The untouchables were given a new name—Harijans (children of god)—and elevated to a position even higher than that of the Brahmans, even if only in name. But to caste Hindus a Shudra by any name was not acceptable. As Prof Ghurye puts it,¹ "...the (untouchable) classes, ground down by age-long traditions, have not yet produced a sufficient number of men who can organize them to take care of their rights by public agitation". Education (but not as visualised by the upper classes and not as existing in India today) of the depressed classes is essential to the betterment of their lot. But 'poverty and established practice conspire to make them shun education'.² Untouchability is widely prevalent in villages though not practised to the same degree in urban centres where the exigencies of modern life have forced caste Hindus to change their attitudes and reconcile themselves, however reluctantly, as the necessary contact with the untouchables, industrialization, with the concomitant heterogeneity and habits of urban life, has helped to reduce inter-caste tension. But one of the ill-effects of adult franchise has been to 'strengthen caste' as 'the villager, other things being equal, prefers to vote for his casteman'.³ This is amply borne out by an analysis of the elections in India for constituencies other than those at urban centres.

The Constitution of India prescribes certain safeguards to improve

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Madras - 17.

the lot of the discriminated classes (including tribes). But to conclude from such assurances on paper that 'caste is on its last legs' is wholly erroneous. Even 'educated', urbanized and Westernized Indians who might proclaim so practise rites and habits which are manifestations of their respective castes. If anything, caste consciousness can be said to have increased, as is evidenced by the increase in number of banks, hostels, societies, schools and scholarships, etc., catering to one particular caste or even sub-caste. Some castes are fighting hard to be classified as 'backward' in an effort to secure special privileges. The development programmes in rural areas have invariably helped the wealthier section of the rural populace who are also the dominant castes in the region. Caste is an important consideration in the 'selection of candidates to posts, and in their promotion, efficiency being less important'.²

The leaders of the dominant castes are quick to grab at economic and political opportunities but are very conservative socially. They have a vested interest in keeping the Harijans backward³ as the untouchables constitute an important source of cheap slave labour. Their advancement will deprive the caste Hindus of their services and also constitute a threat to the dominance of the upper castes. The condition of Harijan farm labourers is akin to serfdom. Anti-Harijan sentiments are strongest in villages and attempts by the untouchables to exercise their constitutional rights have led to brutal attacks on them by caste Hindus. Many of the jobs, school and college seats, scholarships and free studentships reserved for backward castes and tribes (called scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in official use) have gone to members of dominant Hindu castes.

The caste system thrives in a feudal, static economy with minimal occupational and spatial mobility. The situation in our villages is very nearly ideal for its existence and propagation. The measures le-

gislated by the Government to reduce inequality are full of loopholes and are insincere. 'Good intentions alone are not enough'.² The Indian upper—and middle—classes pay lip service to egalitarianism. Their attitudes are fundamentally neo-capitalist, bourgeois and hierarchial.

Prof M. N. Srinivas foresees 'the occurrence of fighting and shedding of blood' between untouchables and caste Hindus, in the efforts of the former to gain equality of rights, opportunities and status with the latter as guaranteed by the constitution. He further comments most prophetically one would like to add, "...the general public will only awaken to the issues when fighting and bloodshed occur." "It is only then that the issues which are being currently discussed by sociologists and social workers will be discussed everywhere, in streets, tea-shops and verandahs." The diehard upper caste members are increasingly resorting to 'overt agreement and covert sabotage' to deny the untouchables a better life.

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Book Review

The 1972 War

INDIA'S CHINA WAR

By Neville Maxwell

Jainco Publications, Bombay.

Enlarged Edition, 1973: Price: Rs. 10.00.

THIS comparatively inexpensive paperback edition of Maxwell's widely known book is to be welcomed. But having said this, one feels like entering a series of caveats. The publisher has undoubtedly ill-served the author: while the main body of this paperback edition is only 'offset' from the plates of the hardback (in a reduced, eye-straining format), the 'Post Script' (so thus, in the 'List of Contents') seems to have been so casually composed and printed—the pagination of this part is disorganized—that one wonders if the author should at all be held responsible for it. But with all the irritations caused by the misprints and ill-chosen types, the postscript is a wonderfully rewarding little piece, and it substantially adds to the value and use of the original book.

Apart from some revealing tidbits about the attempts of the GOI to ignore, later suppress and finally belittle the significance of the original work, the postscript surveys, all too briefly, the accounts of the 1962 events written by some of the civilian and military participants that have appeared since the first publication of the book. These are the accounts of Thapar, Palit, Kaul and Mullick. Especially rewarding are Maxwell's comments on Mullick's work; and the portrait of Nehru that emerges out of Mullick's account is especially brought into sharp focus by Maxwell. Metaphorically speaking, Maxwell only italicises portions of Mullick's book, portions about which the latter had been coyly reticent. The original criticism (Maxwell's) of the 'Forward Policy' receives additional support, as it were, in the analysis

of the 'revelations' of Mullick. The 'Forward Policy' stands condemned by its most active exponent, though perhaps unwittingly. The fact that as late as June 1962, at the Geneva Conference on Laos, there was a real possibility of preventing the border hostilities, and in Chou En-lai's words, 'there must have been some external cause for this (i.e., Krishna Menon's failure to pursue the matter on his return to Delhi from Geneva), must be, as Maxwell states, due to the illusions of impending military glory nourished by Nehru and his advisers.

But the 'external causes' could also be that by-the-then-visible cracks in the 'communist monolith' might have emboldened Nehru and his advisers to take a belligerent stand, no doubt hoping (at least) for Soviet neutrality in the event of a Sino-Indian conflict. Nehru and his advisers were not aware how fortunate they were: for while maintaining a seemingly neutral position in the early stages of the conflict and indeed in the period that immediately followed the conflict, the Soviet Union moved to a 'neutral in favour of India' position. Now, more than a decade later, the 'freezing' of the Sino-Indian boundary question has been at last partially due to this unexpected, then greatly cherished but now being seen as not so wonderful at all, Soviet 'endorsement' of India's stand in the Sino-Indian border dispute.

What has Maxwell's book to teach us? No doubt it has some lessons for the ruling classes. From a purely 'non-ideological' point of view, Maxwell has stripped the Indian official version of all its mendacities and hypocrisies, though he seems at the same time to be an admirer of a system which made the prevarications necessary. No doubt this stand of Maxwell would be perfectly understandable to a West-oriented liberal democrat. But even the West-oriented liberal democrats have their uses; they have the capacity to recognize in the ruling classes their own image, and are able to 'spot'

them effortlessly. Truth, like Murder, will presumably be always out; but a bit of burrowing for it would undoubtedly aid in its emergence, especially when truth is sought to be concealed by such cunning perpetrators of falsehood as the Indian ruling classes. The deviousness of Nehru and his advisers—falking Panchasheel and sending provocative border sorties, our own Desi version of Talk Softly But Carry A Big Stick—is also most convincingly and brilliantly brought out by Maxwell, and the postscript offers additional evidence of this deviousness, evidence culled from Mullick's account of his years with Nehru.

Of late, in fact for some years now, the Indian ruling classes have been making all kinds of love noises, as it were, all directed towards China.

Diplomatic moves and etiquette are no doubt very elaborate and slow; but at the same time instead of recognizing the consistency of Chinese foreign policy aims and attitudes (perfectly clear in the context of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought), the Indian ruling classes have been alternating between clapping their hands in joy because Mao smiled and shook hands with the Indian Charge d'Affaires, and wringing their hands in agony because China refuses to recognize Bangladesh. Rather like a 'respectable' person who is desperately eager to be bad, the Indian ruling classes are facing the terrible problem of not seeming to be too forward, nor wanting to be taken to be too frigid. But after all, the whole world now knows that it was not China that forced the conflict; and while there is certainly not even a suggestion on the part of China that India would approach it in sackcloth and ashes, a certain amount of objective self-introspection, without pseudo-Hamletian attitudinisations, is undoubtedly called for. It is precisely because we are incapable of this kind of genuine self-introspection and criticism, because of our perfervid conviction of our own total moral supe-

riority to everybody else in the world—our other superiorities, like the superiority of our political system, social organizations, philosophy etc., all naturally follow from this assumption of moral superiority—that we are unable to 'start a dialogue' with China. This moral arrogance of Nehru and his advisers is most convincingly brought out in Maxwell's book; the postscript shows how this moral arrogance has, if anything, only intensified and has indeed atrophied our political stance.

One last word. This enlarged edition was out after the Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971; and yet, there is hardly any mention of it in the postscript. The fact that Sino-Indian reconciliation has been made more difficult than ever as a consequence of this treaty is recognized by everybody, including the Indian ruling classes. One wishes that Maxwell had dealt with this aspect in his postscript; and I hope that a future edition of the book will not merely make the 'Post Script' more presentable, but will include an analysis of the interlinks between Sino-Indian, Sino-Soviet and Indo-Soviet relationships.

M. S. PRABHAKAR

Ghasiram Kotwal

IRS

THIS drama by Vijay Tendulkar (13th January, AIFACS Hall, New Delhi) is something of an event in the capital. Not that it has set the Yamuna afire. Nothing does these days. Not in this capital. But one must be thankful for small mercies in the face of the pervasive philistinism that characterizes Delhi. When other theatre groups here are busy with comic banalities and prurient horse play, it is courageous, indeed of Abhiyan to have taken out an episode from our history bearing too uncomfortably on the contemporary scene. In the process the play destroys the popular myth about

one of our mini-heros, Nana Phadnavis.

Poona, administered by Nana on behalf of the Peshwa, symbolized the corruptions of a decadent society in a lurid style. Brahmins, greedy and demoralized, mutely witnessed their homes desecrated and wives lured. Nana's lechery was insatiable—six wives and several concubines were far too few as fuel for his passions which were demonic. Poona groaned under an ignominious heap of crime, corruption and tyranny. Nana was lucky to have fixed on his Kotwal (Deputy S.P.) as the scapegoat who was torn to pieces, the irate Brahmins having thus settled scores with an upstart who had humiliated and harmed them, as if frenziedly.

Much else happens before this finale, including the death (by branding) of a Brahmin, and (by strangling) of a nurse, and of Lalita Gauri, the daughter of Ghasiram Kotwal. Ghasi is a bloody male version of Thackeray's Becky Sharp—both innocents caught in the coils of a cruel world. The people once again miss recognizing and destroying their real enemy, Nana, who continues as ever with his life of debauchery, and Poona resumes its merry-go-round callously. This does not detract from the significance of Ghasiram's nemesis in that he symbolizes the tyrannous arm of the government of Peshwas, (more correctly, Nana. It is peoples' victory, but...

Sutradhar, played with superb aplomb by Vinod Nath Pal, is both Tiresias and Sanjay, the observer, commentator and participant besides. He is the running thread throughout. His poise and versatility, exploited well, renders others on the stage into his puppets. He is a sufferer and activist too. How small besides him appear Nana and Ghasi Kotwal. Mannequins beside a master.

Acting credits are due to the whole team. Yet Shankar Suhail as the lecherous Nana, and the girls playing Gulabi and Nurse, deserve special mention. Samir Moitra as a Kotwal is adequate but needs a

streamline, particularly in his pronouncement. Ghasiram's moral lapse before Nana looked slightly abrupt, investing the latter with some inscrutable Mephistophelean quality which is irresistible when wilful.

The Lavani was used with interesting effect. Parts of a rhyme repeated in chorus had the incantatory spell. How 'Ram Krishna Hari' refrain could at times be as biting as satire was evident on many occasions. The mixture similarly, thumri and dadra with Tukarami bhajans heightened the starkness of hypocrisy and sordidness. Music gave competent support. Stylization in feet movement was judicious and selective. One example of slogans can state: EK HIL NANA, BAQI SAB ZENANA.

Meaningful drama, masterfully produced. Rajendranath as director acquitted himself with distinction. A small point of caution. Why was it necessary to adopt a dialect (Braj bhasha) instead of standard Hindi for translation? Some South Indian friends in the audience wondered. A pertinent question the producer must consider, which is somewhat of a flaw detracting from the otherwise gripping and socially conscious play, which gave in a long time imaginative theatre a wholesome drama.

Not Much Different

MRIGANKA SEKHAR RAY

IN the assessment of any artistic creation, it is always desirable to judge the thing in totality, and not to be swayed by the honest intentions or the boldness of attempt, for these two elements hardly matter in measuring the ultimate artistic achievement. But this is where our average film critics err whenever they review a Hindi film which comes with the faintest semblance of difference. The film is overpraised like anything and often the critics

other drama develops from his relationships with the members of the staff, which is totally unconvincing. The director has not included any song in the film, nor are there rolling-eyed villains chasing the heroine, but as has been said before, those negative qualities can never make up for the absence of positive artistic merits.

Saudagar deals with a more challenging material and makes a complete hash of it. The film is based on a Bengali short story, has failed to retain the subtle, lyrical mood of the original which is a tender portrayal of human frailties. The director is clearly out of his wits in grappling with the theme and his objective documentation of the characters and locale lack authenticity. The Muslim peasant community of south Bengal as depicted in this film looks hopelessly unreal like a chunk of Bombay film colony grafted on to Bengal village. The tense triangle between the peasant hero and his two wives, one a homely sort and the other a love-bird, demands more sensitive handling and the emotional intensity of characterisation is nowhere felt. While maintaining a facade of respectability and restraint, the film has all the run-of-the-mill situations in a Hindi film. The hero follows the singing heroine, only this time it is not the Marine Drive, or Juhu Beach or snow-cad Kashmir, but the marshy paddy-fields of South Bengal in a village-hut, instead of in a posh night-club. Just a clever camouflage, that's all and the entire film gives one the impression that the Bombay stars are just performing a fancy dress ball in peasant costumes.

Mercifully the Bengali film *Epar-Opar* has no artistic pretensions and openly professes to be a box-office sop. It fails to click for an abject amateurishness in all aspects of film-making. The hero, a jail-breaker, meets the heroine, a church-singer, in the habit of making the sign of the cross at odd moments and preaching sermons of

Christian piety. A series of flash-backs unfolds the hero's past, the oft-told tale of good-turned-bad, a concoction of tear-jerking sentimentality. The finale is pure stock, the villain's retribution through death and the hero's redemption through police handcuffs and the ending comes as a relief to all.

Birla Academy Exhibition

SANDIP SARKAR

THE seventh annual exhibition of the Academy of Art and Culture had works that were good, bad and indifferent. Yet we are told that selection of the exhibits was in the hands entirely of judges who are all honourable men but whether they did this work competently is a different question altogether. With a little reservation, however, one might endorse awards of Rs. 1000/- each given to four artists. Four other artists were given certificates of merit.

Out of the 183 works (of painting, sculpture, graphics and collage) selected, 83 did not have the merit to be shown at this exhibition. Mediocrity prevailed and spoilt one's appetite for things, better. Like a Hindi film there were moments of high drama interspersed with banal episodes and some attempts at comic relief.

Even where artists were serious, and let us say honest, there were works that had no relevance to the present-day Indian scene. Some were even worse, for they grimaced in the mirror to approximate certain Western models to the total bewilderment of the viewer.

Ganesh Pyne's awards winning "The Reluctant Pedlar" done in tempera and ink was different. The pedlar, with his basket is going through weary deserted streets and a street dog is seen watching him. The whole atmosphere is morbid as

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to see through the masquerade of pretensions. It is true that some films from the Bombay commercial set-up (I am leaving out the genre of off-beat cinema, mostly sponsored avant-garde type which are outside the usual trade which have tried to hatch some new ideas, but mostly that's a half-hearted compromise between art and commerce, an ingenious formula to make the best of both worlds. True they often discard the routine ingredients of Hindi cinema such as songs, dances, fights etc., but that in itself is no positive virtue. The question is what ultimately they purport to express? There we see the familiar cliches, the gross sentimentality, the over-dramatised situations, in fact the old stuff again unadorned with a gurb of superficial polish. And our critics mistake these pretentious duds for real creative excursions. It harms the film-maker, because lured by that easy prestige he does not try for better standards. This is what has happened in the cases of *Achanak* and *Saudagar*, the two most over-rated Hindi films of recent times.

After all what is *Achanak*? Just a melodramatic tale of a cuckolded husband, an Othello type army officer who kills his wife and her boy friend and then goes to the gallows. The film's construction through a jumble of flashback pieces is clumsy, confusing and often-irritating. The triangle is weakly drawn and the analogy between the hero's triumph in his military exploits and his tragic defeat on the home front has not come off with any dramatic impact. The hero undergoes an operation in a hospital and there an-

For Frontier contact

People's Book House

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Meher House,

Fort, Bombay

Ganesh tries to identify with the pedlar's lot, indicating that a creative artist has to reluctantly sell his painting. The dog is there as he was on the way to 'mahaprasthana', at this moment he does not lead but is nonchalant. The colours are luminous although soft and mild. The whole thing is rather decorative and there is a greeting card element in it.

Manu Parekh's award-winning "Growth" is extremely disturbing. Parekh seems to climb on top of the viewer's head, breaks open the skull and starts taking out every thing. His yellows, greens, blues and blacks, multiple built-in perspectives with figures, triangles, rectangles and round shapes increase the velocity to bombard the viewer with savage fury. There is a sort of skill but essentially it is a non-art canvas. Why he should be given a prize is beyond comprehension.

To my mind the judges seemed to have neglected Sunil Das. His large canvas 447 c.m. & 147 c.m. has shown what a skilful artist he is. In spite of traits of commercialism the total impact is quite charming. One can feel his hands, mind and body were physically involved in the work. Robin Mondal's primitive women seems repetitive. I think he should work on other fields of interest. Manab Barua seems to have been influenced by folklore and creation myths. Bikash Bhattacharya's "Another day" is interesting, the sky, the barb wire fencing, bomb craters cannot take away the beauty of a sunny day as a tiny toddler goes out for a walk. A haunting look of despair in Amitabha Banerjee's birds reflects the influence of the U.S. propaganda journal *Span*. Jogen Chaudhuri's squashed quilt and flying pillow with "Bhalobasa" written on

it seems silly. Shymal Dutta Ray and Anilbaran Saha have shown how simpleminded both of them are. Dilip Dasgupta has a feel for lush vegetation. Salil Bhattacharya, has a draughtman's fist but no new ideas. Aloke Bhattacharya's 'Portrait of the Captive' has boldness of thought but overzealousness spoils the effect. Sankar Guha shows a creative insight but seems a bit out of breath. Madhavi Parekh and Gita Bhattacharya give the viewer some relief with a breath of freshness. Veena Bhargava's "Victim" has sustained power but the influence of Paritosh Sen is too obvious.

In the sculpture section Phul Chand Pyne amazes with the simplicity of his terracotta owl. Madhav Bhattacharya fails to convince. In the graphic section Sanat Kar is too pretty to be convincing. Bani Mitra's coloured etching and Manohar have shown their sense of composition and sincerity.

One feels that a more careful selection would have altered the exhibition by giving it a character. The show reflects the strength and the weakness of Calcutta artists—their lack of aesthetic vision makes them bow to foreign influence and forces them to imitate artistic fashions of the day.

Banerjee's graphics

Readers are aware of my aversion to any artist showing at the USIS auditorium, so from now on I won't waste precious space on the subject. Dipak Banerjee, a young artist, exhibited his graphics at the auditorium January 11-17.

Graphics is a difficult medium as artists find it hard to resist the temptation of depending on accidents. Banerjee has given a good account of himself on this score. He has been able to import certain subtle feelings, certain delicate rhythms that speak for his competence. But he is prone to take disastrous risks also. The freshness in his approach makes us predict that he will be able to show still better results in future.

Letter

Our Painters

I would like to request your critic, Mr Sandip Sarkar, to analyse contemporary art (or whatever he thinks worth criticising, rather) in terms of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, with an attempt to assess its social relevance, and draw parallels from progressive artists the world over. Mr Sarkar is too lenient to call a spade a spade, and even the most obvious marks of decadence to young contemporary artists leave him unperturbed. Is it not time that he lashed away at the insensate structures around us known as 'painters', who are absolutely callous to the hopes and aspirations of the toiling masses, caring for nothing but paint, brush and canvas, still avidly looking forward to the condescending purport of the rich spectator? What have our artists done towards ushering a new social order? What have our painters done to enlighten the masses about class contradictions? Are they politically conscious? Or what are the problems that beset them? I suppose the questions do not lose their relevance when one looks at our artists who form an inseparable part of our culture and yet at the same time are completely detached from the progressive cultural milieu. If literature, the cinema and the theatre can come within the purview of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, why not the fine arts? Look at Vietnam, Cuba, pre-Khrushchev Soviet Russia, look at Latin America, let alone China, where art always goes with a precise social purpose under the guidance of the Communist Party.

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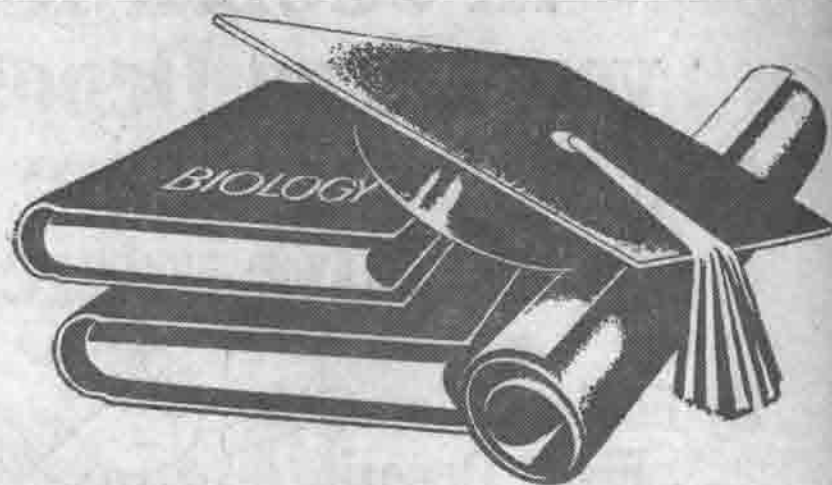
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