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On Other Pages

EMERGENCY AGAIN

COMMENT	2
THE CRISIS TO FRONTATION]; Economic Disorder and the Working Class	
Abdur Sami	3
UNITY: A RESPONSE	
Prabhu Chatterjee	7
'CLEAN OLD MAN'	
Sho Yamakawa	9
QUENTINARY TRIBUTE TO JOHN MILTON	
Biren Ghoshan	10
NE LIGHT	
Shyama Sanyal	12
FACTS	
IN A DRAMA CRITIC	13
LETTERS	18

IT surprised quite a few when the Bangladesh President proclaimed a state of emergency; they were under the impression that emergency had been declared much earlier and much too often and was still in force. Perhaps this time it is a super state of emergency, though the reasons given do not sound so urgent because they are so familiar: a group of people, who had opposed the war of liberation and had done their best to prevent the emergence of a sovereign independent Bangladesh, have since then been active in various subversive activities and they have been joined by others who failed to attain power by constitutional means. "Some collaborators of the Pakistan army, notorious for their anti-national crimes, extremists and enemy agents in the pay of foreign powers for subverting the State are engaged now in activities which are creating impossible conditions in the country for attaining normal political stability and orderly economic progress."

A presidential order has suspended fundamental rights conferred by certain articles of the Constitution. This also is news. Were not these rights suspended, in practice, long ago? Soon after the Constitution was framed, the Government passed Presidential Order No. 50 and other laws to empower the Rakhi Bahini and other para-military formations as well as the police to search, arrest and detain people without trial. It was these legal powers which institutionalised violence and terror and political assassinations have been a daily feature. The atrocities committed by these forces are too well known to be repeated. It is also known that it is the rapacious, corrupt 'farias' passing off as politicians and administrators who have bled the people white and made it impossible to attain economic progress. The gross domestic product is down by about 14 per cent, agricultural yield by 15 per cent and industrial output has shrunk. Prices have risen more than 80 per cent. Foreign aid amounting to U.S. \$3000 million has enriched quite a few, not excluding Mujib's near and dear ones, but not the masses. Thousands of people have died and are dying in the famine that still stalks Bangladesh. It is being suspected that the Government is not allowing local and most foreign relief workers to operate because it would like the majority of the rural unemployed to be eliminated through starvation and disease—a policy of quiet genocide. The Government knows that the floods, the famine and the high prices have not devitalised the entire peasantry. Sheikh Mujib is in the habit of saying that the skyhigh price of rice and other agricultural produce is a boon to the peasantry who

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form over 80% of the population. In fact rural unemployment was somewhat reduced and the daily wages of rural labour went up. Those who could not benefit have, however, no right to survive.

Events since December 1971 have shown that is the Awami League, in collusion with the Government of India, that has prevented the emergence of a truly sovereign, independent Bangladesh. The trappings are all there; but inside it is all hollow. The distress is so keen that after three years people have started speaking wistfully of the good old days before 1971 when Pakistan was intact.

It is difficult to guess the reason for the latest state of emergency under which troops and para-military forces have taken up positions in cities and

towns throughout the country. True, Mujib no longer has that charisma—but does he care so long as the forces of law and order are ruthless? A poor peasant starving to death, may say, 'Mujib has no problems; he has three meals a day', but no party or combination of parties has yet been able to organise and be an effective counter-force. This, in spite of the large quantities of arms and ammunition still at large. Power does not come out of the barrel of a gun if the hand that holds it is not guided by the right politics. Objective conditions are ripe for a violent upheaval in Bangladesh, but the situation is and will be more difficult to grasp even if some parties can rise to the occasion: there is bound to be foreign intervention, as in Sri Lanka.

41 A Gratuitous Advice

There is nothing new in the opinion expressed by the Chief Election Commissioner that an amendment of the Constitution will be necessary to make a mid-term parliamentary poll before April this year possible. The constitutional provision making it mandatory to delimit constituencies on the basis of revised population figures after every census is well known. Mrs Gandhi's Government took refuge under this provision to turn down the demand for an early election to the Gujarat Assembly which would have certainly resulted in a miserable defeat for her party. But consistency not being part of her political style, the possibility of her meddling with the very provision which stood her in good stead in Gujarat has always loomed. Taking all things into consideration, including perhaps Soviet advice and astrological forecasts, if she decides on a pre-April poll, nothing will prevent her from seeking parliamentary approval for a proposal to amend the Constitution. The meek majority in Parliament is ever ready to grant all her wishes.

The Chief Election Commissioner's comments are important for a different reason. He holds his office under the Constitution and as Mr Swaminathan himself

has declared, he is an independent constitutional authority responsible for conducting free and fair elections. It is odd that a person charged with the responsibility for ensuring that elections are held in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution should himself suggest amendment of a mandatory provision of the Constitution for the benefit of the ruling party. The gratuitous advice can be reasonably interpreted as approval by a dignitary holding a supra-governmental position. Maybe the TV interview was arranged to enable the Chief Election Commissioner to proclaim that no ethical principle will be violated if the Constitution is amended and parliamentary poll is held on the basis of partial delimitation of constituencies. His idea of fair elections is sufficiently elastic to encompass two different categories of constituencies—delimited and undelimited. Only a few days ago it was officially announced in Parliament that delimitation work would not be completed before July; but Mr Swaminathan has said that the work can be condensed a little and completed by "about April or so". It seems he is hurrying the Delimitation Commission lest it should be caught with its pants down if the Prime Minister opts

for an early poll but without any amendment of the Constitution.

Some opposition leaders have taken exception to the blatant partisanship of the Chief Election Commissioner by the ruling party. It is inherent in the opposition reaction that free and fair is not possible under the present circumstances. There is no indication that opposition parties are thinking of coming up to their prognostication, but of crying themselves hoarse over a crafty plan of the Prime Minister to spring a parliamentary election on them if they had unitedly declared that they would not participate in a poll that would be held by arbitrarily amending a mandatory provision of the Constitution. It might have had some effect on the ruling party. Even the one-party democracy the Prime Minister believes in needs some opposition parties to be trounced in elections by fair means or foul. But this form of protest is dominant to the opposition parties. They will always stop short of open disapproval. They will never take part in elections knowing that the elections will be rigged. The Prime Minister knows that however much the opposition parties may protest against a snap poll, they will give democratic respectability by participating in it. Naturally, she does not see a tinker's cuss for protests by election-oriented parties.

Same As Before

The current food policy of the West Bengal Government is going to be a dismal failure as it was last year when it could procure only 1.5 lakhs tonnes of rice against a target of 5 lakh tonnes. The policy is simple: the food policy has basically retained the previous year's policy of appeasing the jotedars, the rich peasants and the rice millers.

Available reports from districts show that peasants hardly sell their produce to the Food Corporation's procurement agents. The Government procurement price is much less than the market price of rice, and the rice-millers as well as hoarders, taking advantage of this

From Crisis To Confrontation : Economic Disorder And The Working Class

RANJIT SAU

PROLONGED setback in industrial production, widespread famine conditions, and rapid inflation — all these maladies are interwoven in the current situation in India. While the roots of these three phenomena go down much deep into the polity and economy that is India, and quite far back in its longitude of time, the reasons for the occurrence of this particular conjunction as it had happened since mid-1972 are more immediate and proximate.

The bourgeoisie in India has an uncanny knack for making a fast buck. It seeks specially those lines of production where the profit is certain, and quick to come. Durable and semi-durable consumer goods or their ancillaries are most favoured by the capitalist to engage in, their market being fairly assured and attractive. Meanwhile, the Government obligingly provides the necessary infrastructure, and builds up the areas where private capital would not or could not enter. This arrangement of convenience is nothing new; it could be found even in the pages of the Bombay Plan of Tata-Birla, dated 1944.

India's industry, however, remains a prisoner of a market limited to a thin uppermost stratum of the population. The richest one-fifth of the population eat up more than half of the consumer goods produced by industry. The top one-tenth of the population alone devour over one-third. There are clear indications that the poorer sections of the people are reduced to a position of spending less and less of their budget on industrial goods! The home market for industrial consumer goods of course is not absolutely static; it is only rising

the money is being misused, but he has implied more than that. He has now only confirmed what has been an open secret for all these years—that the relief money hardly ever goes to the people for whom it is meant. It somehow leaks out of the long distribution channel and goes to line the pockets of powerful politicians and influential officials, conniving with one another. To these people, the exclusive interest in life is making money, and no avenue, no opportunity is too low or too beastly for them. This has been going on for years now, and has almost been accepted as a part of life. But what is surprising is that the Centre should wake up to this practice only now, after allowing it to flourish and get firmly entrenched over the past decades.

If the Centre means business and really goes about monitoring the use of the relief funds, it could possibly raise a hornet's nest. But like most other ministerial statements, nobody has presumably taken it seriously. Like most other well-intentioned moves, it will also never become a reality. It has so many flaws, so many loopholes that the corrupt politicians and officials will manage to circumvent it in one way or the other. After all, the people who would be asked to do the "monitoring" will themselves not be above board. There is nothing to guarantee that they in turn would not be corrupted. Past experience shows that this type of policing agency becomes a party to the game. In fact, relief funds have long become a handy device for politicians for distributing largesse among their respective camp followers. The evil is thus not in the stars, but in the political system of which Mr Subramaniam is both a product and a protector. To believe that a mere threat of monitoring would undo a vile practice that has grown over the years is seeing pie in the sky. How far much better would it have been indeed if instead of spending so many crores of rupees on relief the Government had made some really earnest efforts to minimise the ravages of drought and floods? But what is rational is not always politically the most wise or even feasible.

... have been purchasing rice in huge quantities from the open market to fill the godowns. Distress sale, which accounts for nearly 20 per cent of the market for rice and paddy, is being almost completely snuffed up by the jotedars who use this stock to pay their levy and keep their own stock for sale in the black market.

... with the prospect of another election, the West Bengal Government, and some of the Ministers, are saying that parties other than the Congress are launching procurement operations in these areas.

... the Congress Government always stands on the side of big traders and has proved by a recent statement by A. P. Shinde, Minister of State for Agriculture and Irrigation, in the Lok Sabha, that no wholesaler had defaulted in handing over rice and wheat to the Government on account of the 50 per cent levy. As is known, when the wholesaler gives up, it is a surrender to the black-market tactics of the traders, the latter then hand over 50 per cent of their stocks to the Government. By July 1974 it was quite clear that the wholesaler would not care less. The total investment in wheat was less than 2 million rupees, which was only 8 per cent of the production, the previous year's investment having been of the order of Rs 18 per cent. The governments of the Centre and in the States were left with no stocks, and food prices ran away in many heights. There were famine conditions in different States. Even after A. P. Shinde claimed that the wholesalers had honoured their commitments, is he a Minister of State for Agriculture and Irrigation or Minister for defending hoarders and blackmarketeers?

Pie In The Sky

The Union Finance Minister, Mr C. Subramaniam's rather bland statement that the Centre will "monitor" the use of funds given to States for drought and flood relief is, to say the least, intriguing. Mr Subramaniam has not said that

JANUARY 4, 1975

within the confinements of narrow walls as demarcated by the top ten per cent or so, of the population. Under such circumstances, the bourgeoisie finds it worth while to restrict output, hike prices and make the most out of a bunch of inelastic consumers. Strange it may sound, but evidently less production pays more.

It was a grand arrangement; it was working well. But something got out of hand. The Government could no longer keep up the balance; it faltered. Since the early sixties public investment like the stone of Sisyphus began to roll down. Basic and capital goods industries by 1963-64 were working at about full capacity; and as public investment in these areas dried up the user industries in the forward linkage began to feel the pinch. Excess capacity arose here and there. Moreover, the drought of 1965 accentuated the tension, and soon resulted in a full-scale recession all around, except in consumer durables. The brief revival of 1968-70 came in the wake of a spurt in the demand for durable consumer goods that was stimulated by the bumper harvest.² It was a short spell; the economy took a plunge once again. All along the Government had failed to sustain its level of investment. Today's industrial stagnation is the culmination of the process that had set in during the early sixties. State capitalism in industry had approached its dead end.

The 'new agricultural strategy' launched officially in 1965 was a bonanza to the rich farmers in the irrigated areas of Punjab, Haryana and Western U.P. in particular. It was a strategy of concentrating the resources such as fertiliser, agricultural implement, etc. in a limited zone which already had assured water supply. The initial result in terms of additional output was encouraging; but soon the euphoria gave in to disappointment. And by 1972 it was all over. The 'new agricultural strategy' had certainly helped a few rich farmers but foodgrains production had returned to where it was before. Now there was more profit in trading wheat than in producing it.³ The days of the traders have come back with a vengeance. If State capitalism in industry has reached its limit, in agriculture it has lost its way in the maze of merchant capital.

'Triangular Monopoly'

Foodgrain prices indeed have shot up the most, and far beyond the extent of shortage in production in the last two years. Meanwhile, a three-dimensional concentration has taken place in foodgrains: **cropwise**, it is mainly one crop, wheat, that accounts for approximately half of the additional output in recent years; **regionwise**, a contiguous area of Punjab, Haryana and western U.P. has produced the bulk of this output; and **classwise**, a small group of rich farmers have taken to the new technology with enormous advantage to themselves. This triangular monopoly, so to speak, "has a built-in inflationary bias".⁴

Just as India's industry stands on a thin layer of basic and capital goods, so does its agriculture on a narrow strip of irrigated land, with the remaining four-fifths of the total cultivated area exposed to the uncertainties of drought and flood. In such an economy, growth cannot be steady; cyclical fluctuations are bound to be recurring, if not increasingly severe. Merchant capital thrives in such a soil; for trade is more lucrative than production.

The rapid rise in foodgrain prices was far above what was warranted by the shortfall in output in the last two years. As for industrial prices, though rising at a slower pace, the blame can scarcely be laid on the cost side. The price of a tonne of cement machinery, for instance, had gone up by four times between 1963 and 1974, while its major input, steel, had become only twice more expensive. It is obvious that neither labour charges nor the charges of other inputs determine the dynamics of industrial pricing. It is a coterie of manufacturers who send the prices spiralling.⁵

Today's economic disorder can hardly be understood, much less explained, unless the class alignments in the country are kept in view. However, the immediate factors which consummated the constellation from mid-1972 onwards are easier to locate. The failure of the 'new agricultural strategy' to achieve and sustain a breakthrough in foodgrains production became evident to all by 1972; side by side its success in making the rich farmers richer was felt all around. On the other hand, the continuous faltering

of the Government to keep the pace of State capitalism going with ever more public investment in basic industries, already cast a shadow of gloom on the rays of hope were gone. The excitement of the eventful year 1971 opened up a devouring appetite; but eventually the Government could not do much, at least not in proportion to what the capitalists had counted for. By and by side, the ruling party, barely for the sake of its own survival, had to lubricate the political machine at an enormous price. Money poured in; turned on a fast; and disappeared in what is called the parallel economy — or, in simple terms, the underworld of black money. In mid-1972 all these got intermingled into a monstrous combination; and the net results are here and now for all to see.

What we see today is, by and large, a crisis of State capitalism, swamped as it is by merchant capital in a semi-feudal semi-colonial economy.

Contradictions

Agricultural prices are soaring relatively much ahead of the prices of industrial products; a pair of scissors which it were is opening up in order to meet the vanishing consumer. The deteriorating terms of trade for industrial goods apparently indicate a contradiction between agriculture and industry in so far as the home market is concerned. Rising foodgrain prices indeed erode the consumer's budget, and cut into his demand for the products of industry. But one cannot be sure as to what extent the official data, being what they are, can bear the brunt of this proposition. For the price index does not capture the transactions in the black market that cover a large part of the exchange. Besides, merchant capital is an all-pervasive phenomenon; it has brought under its

the output of factories. With a terms of trade industry had lost

The contradiction agriculture in India is not so much in a 'crisis', that is, of industry vis-à-vis agriculture as it is in articulated contradiction between the one hand and the other. It is the surplus capital has ceased industry and

If you now in terms of the India today, what more can where the class and that of Most probable class combination, without effect in its manufacturing and marketeering one fine additional contradiction industry; merchant exploiting agriculture. The current economic outcome of in turn is g

The ruling exploiters in this riddle interests, directions, and the common people industrial economy seriously however with the

CORRECTION

The Fifth Plan allocation for research in science and technology (mentioned in 'Investment Strategy for Promoting Inequality', December 21 issue, page 5, col. 2) is Rs. 1600 crores, and not Rs. 160 crores as misprinted.

JANUARY 4, 1975

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of farms as well as of fac-
 With such a denouement the
 of trade between agriculture and
 had lost much of their edges.
 The contradiction between industry and
 in India today is reflected
 much in the form of a 'scissors
 that is, the falling terms of trade
 industry vis-a-vis agriculture, as much
 articulated in the shape of a con-
 between merchant capital on
 one hand and the primary produc-
 agriculture and industry, on the
 is trade that absorbs the bulk
 surplus value; and the trading
 has caught under its net both
 and agriculture.

If you now want to relate this conflict
 in terms of the corresponding classes in
 today, the picture becomes some-
 more complex. One is not sure
 the class of capitalist farmers ends
 that of grain merchants begins.
 probably the one and the same
 combines in itself the dual
 without much of a Faustian con-
 in its heart. It is likely that the ma-
 facturing capitalists and the black-
 merchant are rolled into
 in admixture. And so arises the
 between agriculture and
 more precisely, between the two
 classes—one based on agri-
 the other on industry. The
 economic disorder is partly an
 of this contradiction, which
 is getting intensified as a result.⁶

The ruling classes—that is, the ex-
 in agriculture and industry—are
 dled with an internal tussle of
 pulling each other in diverse
 With skyhigh foodgrain prices
 the dwindling income of the com-
 people, the home market for in-
 consumer goods is finding itself
 constricted. This observation
 must not be held as parallel
 the views of the Narodniks at the

turn of the century with regard to the
 prospects of capitalist development in
 the then Russia, against which Lenin
 waged a running battle. Lenin demon-
 strated with Marx's theory of realisation
 that capitalist production, and, conse-
 quently, the home market, grows not
 so much on account of articles of consump-
 tion as on account of the means of pro-
 duction. For capitalism, therefore, the
 growth of the home market is to a cer-
 tain extent 'independent' of the growth
 of personal consumption.⁷ In India the
 bourgeoisie asks mainly the State to
 produce the means of production so that
 it can engage itself in the high-profit
 articles of personal consumption. The
 State in recent years has failed to per-
 form this task; and the future does not
 appear to be any better. State capital-
 ism in Indian industry, and with it
 private monopoly capitalism as
 well, have come up against the
 wall. The door is now being opened
 in Indian industry and with
 if the private monopoly capital-
 for foreign capital to come in, and to
 breathe another lease of life into the
 system.⁸ How long can it survive with
 borrowed time, however, is yet another
 matter.

The Smoke-screen

The squabble among the exploiters,
 engaged in agriculture and industry,
 for the home market is their own house-
 hold affair. If merchant capital is
 weighing down upon agricultural and
 industrial capitalism, or if the class in-
 terests, of the rural, agrarian bourgeoisie
 are situated somewhat in opposition
 to those of the urban, industrial bour-
 geoisie, no river as such is going to be
 set on fire. This wrangle among the
 ruling classes is a relatively minor con-
 tradiction; evidently it could be resolved
 by them with compromise among them-
 selves, but at the cost of the exploited
 working class. Call it fascism-cum-im-
 perialism if you like; in any case, it is
 through the repression of workers and
 peasants at home and aggression abroad
 that the knot of conflicting class interests
 of the industrial, commercial and agri-
 cultural bourgeoisie gets disentangled—
 at last for the time being.⁹

With the edges of State capitalism

blunted and the camp of the big bour-
 geoisie divided in internal strife, the
 economy reaches an impasse as it has
 happened in India now. Some writers
 have suggested a 'tunnel' as an escape
 route toward faster economic progress.
 Their reasoning is as follows. It is claim-
 ed that the nature of scientific progress
 nowadays is such that the fruits of ad-
 vanced technology can be brought even
 to the door of a small farm or a tiny fac-
 tory. That is, the production function
 exhibits constant returns to scale; and
 small and medium enterprises also can
 be as efficient as their larger counter-
 parts. In the place of such scale-neutral
 technological advance, some other obser-
 vers have cited a bi-modal distribution of
 productivity with regard to farm size,
 to reach the same conclusion. It is there-
 fore possible to visualise a pattern of
 development in which State capitalism—
 more particularly State ownership of
 industries in which there are economies
 of scale—is effectively amalgamated with
 the interests of small producers. This
 then calls for new alignment of classes
 with the benevolent umbrella of State
 capitalism over them. The State ac-
 cordingly has to bypass the big bourgeoisie
 and landlords, and strike a bargain
 with petty capitalist entrepreneurs in in-
 dustry and agriculture.

In the words of an author of this view-
 point: "We have seen that the petty
 capitalist entrepreneur is quite willing to
 adopt relatively modern techniques; the
 same is true of the capitalist farmer in-
 volved in the 'green revolution', though
 not to the same extent. Under the cir-
 cumstances the government support of
 petty capitalist enterprise will raise the
 national level of labour productivity,
 boost the domestic demand for producer
 goods and widen the opportunities for
 industrial development. So the process
 of capitalist integration will be intensified

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JANUARY 4, 1975

and the present weak sectors will catch up with the large-scale industries, **Undoubtedly, this will be better for national economic development.**"¹⁰

It is recognised that government support of small-scale capitalist enterprise in industry and agriculture is a way of encouraging the development of capitalist relations. Such a policy has two opposite consequences. Now as for its negative side, this policy of forming a wide layer of petty capitalist entrepreneurs involves great government expenses. The funds for the purpose can be raised only by the redistribution of the incomes of millions of direct producers in town and country. So the formation of the second echelon of India's ruling class is a heavy burden on the mass of the population.¹¹

The author continues: "the redistribution of the material and financial resources in favour of small-scale entrepreneurship can temporarily slow down the technical and economic progress in large-scale industry, whether public or private. The result of this may well be that the standards of India's industry will increasingly fall behind world ones, thus leading to a drop in exports which, in turn, would cause a deficit in the balance of payments."¹²

So these are the pros and cons of the petty bourgeois development under the protective and fostering care of State capitalism. The State in this scheme would dig a tunnel so to speak in order to reach the petty capitalist entrepreneurs in farm and factory, bypassing the big bourgeoisie and landlords. "Undoubtedly, this will be better for national economic development."¹³ But it is an expensive policy fraught with the danger of disrupting the balance of payments. Hence, the author finally concludes that, while petty bourgeois development is a viable alternative for a country like India for rapid economic growth, "this policy can be conducted only if there is an influx of foreign resources."¹⁴ He kills two birds in one stone; he gives you not only a plan for development, but also the rationale for continuing reliance on foreign capital. Now the Indian economy can grow merrily!

The State is essentially an instrument

in the hands of the big bourgeoisie and landlords to further their class interests. It is naive to expect the machinery of State to be so deployed as to touch these exploiters in any way. The pattern of petty bourgeois development under State capitalism is therefore a utopian dream. True, the current economic crisis has gone out of their hands; the ruling classes are placed in a defensive position. They may even be forced a few steps back, but they could come back with a vengeance very soon unless the bridge is burned once and for all. Under these circumstances today's scheme of petty bourgeois development would turn out to be a nightmare tomorrow. This would be a costly way of buying time.

The current economic crisis will sooner or later pass over into the pages of history. Meanwhile, the contradiction between the workers and peasants on the one hand and the ruling classes on the other has been accentuated more than ever before. Will this mighty confrontation hasten the day of showdown? Or, will the opportunity slip out in the midst of petty bourgeois development that is only a smoke-screen for the vested interests of landlords, big bourgeoisie, and imperialism?

NOTES

1. Ranjit Sau, "Some Aspects of International Resource Flow", *Economic and Political Weekly*, special number, August 1974; also "Distant Thunder Breaks over India", *ibid.*, November 9, 1974.
2. Ranjit Sau, "Growth and Fluctuation in the Indian Economy", *ibid.*, Special Number, August 1973, pp. 1494-5.
3. See Prem Kumar, "Solicitous Parties Turn Farmers into Traders", *The Statesman*, Calcutta, November 2, 1974; p. 4.
4. Prabhat Patnaik, "On the Current Inflation in India" (mimeo).
5. K. K. Somani "Coterie of Manufacturers Send Machine Costs Spiralling", *Economic Times*, October 22, 1974.
6. See Ranjit Sau, "Arthanaitik Sankat O Shoshak Shreener Antardwanda" (Economic Crisis and the Internal Contradictions of the Exploiting Classes), *Elshan*, Autumn 1974.

7. V. I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 54.
8. Not only does foreign capital extract and drain away a much higher outflow of surplus compared to the inflow of capital so that eventually the net effect on the domestic resources is negative, it also seriously strains the balance of payments. Over the six-year period 1964-70, for instance, the foreign companies collaborating with the private sector in India exported only Rs. 729 crores of goods as against their import of raw materials etc. worth over twice as much, namely, Rs. 1,600 crores. See Reserve Bank of India, "Survey of Foreign Financial and Technical Collaboration in Indian Industry, 1964-70: Main Findings" *Bulletin*, June 1974, p. 1064.
9. See Sau, "Arthanaitik Sankat O Shoshak Shreener Antardwanda", *op. cit.*
10. G. K. Shirokov, *Industrialisation of India* (Moscow, 1973), p. 313, emphasis added.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 314.
13. See also K. N. Raj, "The Politics and Economics of Intermediate Regimes", *Economic and Political Weekly* (July 7, 1973) specially pp. 1195 and 1198.
14. Shirokov, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

For Frontier contact

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On Unity—A Response

ASHIM CHATTERJEE

THIS is rather a late response to the appeal made in the name of Com. Khokon Mazumdar and another comrade to all the members of the Central Committee of the CPI (ML) elected at the all-India party congress held in May, 1970. In my earlier statement I participated in the great debate concerning the party; instead, I echoed the call for unity by combating all forms of sectarianism issued by the six comrades including Com. Kanu Sanyal in their revolutionary letter from jail. This silence encouraged some to support or oppose me on the basis of wild conjectures and unfounded claims. A statement on the question as well as the wider question of bringing revolutionary unity of all revolutionary forces is necessary. In that sense, this supplements my earlier statement published in May, 1974.

At the very outset let me state it precisely that I think the formation of the CPI (ML) on 22nd April, 1969 was, in the main, correct. There had been an element of unnecessary haste and certain lack, to some extent, of ideological-political preparation as has been rightly pointed out by Com. Kanu Sanyal; but every formation of the CPI (ML) cannot and should not be ruled out on that account. All comrades, specially those of struggling areas, felt its necessity and demanded it. As such, it was the product of objective necessity. The formation of the party was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm by the whole rank and file, and hailed by fraternal parties all over the world, including the great, glorious and correct CPC. From my personal experience, I can firmly state that without the formation of the CPI (ML) the peasant struggle in Gopiballavpur-Dumka would not have been possible. Negation of the formation of the CPI (ML) is the negation of all the valuable experiences of armed struggle, both positive and negative, in the recent past gained through tremendous sacrifice, and such, if it is a betrayal of the martyrs. Next comes the question of evaluation of the eighth congress of the party held

in May, 1970. Undoubtedly, the whole congress surrendered to left-sectarian policies. Everyone present approved the line of secret assassination in the name of class enemy annihilation and none questioned even the programme of annihilation in cities and towns. That absence of any land policy or agrarian programme signifies the negation of the main content of our people's democratic revolution was not pointed out by anyone; none advocated combination with other forms of struggle. The question of mass organisation and mass movement, its relation with the formation of an army or the question of mass line was not raised by anyone. The Indian bourgeoisie as a whole was termed comparador without any protest. As has been subsequently proved by our experience, all these were grave mistakes in policies. In spite of all these, I still think that the positive aspects of the party congress far outweigh its negative ones. In the entire history of the communist movement in India, this congress has the unique glory of upholding the banner of Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse Tung Thought for the first time. The characterisation of the state power, of the four enemies of the Indian revolution, including Soviet social-imperialists, the stage and nature of our revolution was, on the whole, correct. The congress rejected the revisionist trash of 'peaceful orientation' with contempt and firmly stood for armed struggle. All these were some of the positive achievements and had deep political impact in the life of the whole country. Therefore, I recognise the eighth party congress and the Central Committee elected therefrom. One should never forget that the CPC declared the 'general orientation' of the party to be correct, after reviewing all the documents of the party congress. CPI (ML) has the glory of a message from Chairman Mao himself, "By you (in plural), India has hope".

Unfortunately, at present, the party has been divided into groups and factions because of the continuation of left-

sectarian policies for a long period. The left-sectarian deviation has now been defeated as is apparent from the fact that a vast majority of party members including all the Central Committee members have firmly rejected it. Yet, because of the absence of a full fledged positive political line and methodical, persistent, deep and all pervading ideological struggle, remnants of the old left-sectarianism and the danger therefrom persist. In different garbs, it is hindering the ideological, political and organisational re-organisation of the party.

From the platform of the tenth congress of the CPC, Chairman Mao issued the great call. "Practise Marxism, and not revisionism; unite and don't split; be simple and above board, don't conspire and intrigue". Not only the necessity of unity for practising Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-Tung Thought, but also the revolutionary mehtod of doing it has been clearly stated here. For our party which suffered immensely because of the ideology, politics and method of work of Lin Piao, this has special significance.

Reorganisation, Reconstitution, Reunification—call it by any name, it is politically necessary. The Indian reactionaries, beset as they are with irreconcilable contradictions, are paper tigers strategically. But tactically, they should be taken seriously. To win real independence and freedom for the people is a great task. It demands that we fight social-imperialism, imperialism and domestic counter-revolutionaries. Hence all the revolutionary force that can be united should be united. Only the CPI (ML) with its sincerity, dedication, honesty, experience and, above all, ideology and political line can do it. The vast majority of the party cadres as well as the people fervently demand reunification.

Reunification is politically possible. Until now there has been no major political difference, so far as the general line is concerned, among the different groups who have discarded the old sectarian line. All the present "differences" can be discussed and resolved within the framework of a single party.

Some comrades, headed by Satya Narain Singh, have formed a "revived Central Committee". It is an undeniable

fact of party history that along with our respected martyr Comrade Sushital Roy Chowdhury, Comrade SNS initiated, however unsatisfactory, partial and incomplete a way, the fight against left sectarian deviation inside our party. It was a valiant effort to create a centre in a difficult situation. But this Committee has failed to rally the vast majority of comrades because its formation suffered from three defects:

(i) The concept of revival is not a Marxist-Leninist one. It does not denote a process. To many comrades it appears as an indirect effort to place all the responsibility for the mistakes in policy on individuals. I do not know if this concept of revival has any international precedence or not.

(ii) Ideological reorganisation at any level precedes organisational reorganisation. The policy of 'reorganisation first, then ideological struggle' is the policy of putting the cart before the horse. Reorganisation is done only on a clear ideological-political basis.

(iii) No effective initiative was taken to contact all the Central Committee members including those in jail. Naturally, the opinions of those comrades who are in jail should not count organisationally but politically it does matter.

There is another technical flaw. References are being made to my meeting with comrades SNS, Com. Gurbox, RK and Com. Mohinder. Save and except SNS I had not the opportunity of meeting any of the above comrades. Therefore my direct association with the merits or demerits of the November 7 document does not arise, though I broadly agree with the general political line.

Some comrades headed by SG, have formed a COC. The claim of this central body to act as the centre of the CPI (ML) is more dubious. The fight against any deviation is a process. One should be objective; one cannot subjectively relate the initiation of a process with one's own awakening. Moreover, the general line preached by the COC is almost identical with that of the revived Central Committee or with the line being preached and practised by Com. Khokon Mazumdar and others. Also, I think SG should categorically state to

the Party cadres his present stand regarding the national-chauvinistic position taken by him during the dismemberment of Pakistan. I hope he will not sidetrack the issue by pointing out some of my mistakes.

It is interesting to note that both the revived CC and the COC have been compelled to distort the Party history. After bitter lesson we should consciously try to fight all forms of subjectivism. Personally, I shall be happy to be able to work together with comrades SNS and SG along with other comrades again.

Our Party was like a very valuable picture placed in our custody. Because of our immaturity and lack of revolutionary vigilance and alertness, it has, as if, dropped off our hands and broken into pieces. But still it can be mended and a better picture produced. Hence, I appeal to all the comrades, particularly the Central Committee members, to take this task of reunification of the party seriously and call upon the entire party to follow this example.

Basis of Unity

What should be the basis of unity? Obviously the party programme and party constitution adopted in the eighth congress with amendments. The article 'Spring Thunder' and valuable suggestions of the fraternal Party should be the guideline. A document is to be prepared consisting of: (1) Party programme with proper amendments (and not a new programme) and the reasons for the amendments, (2) Party constitution with proper amendments (and not a new constitution), (3) Self-critical report, (4) Political-organisational report.

One should remember that the negation of the documents of the eighth congress is essentially the negation of the congress itself.

This document, prepared after due consultation and discussion, will serve as the basis of reorganisation. In the process of development the ninth congress should be convened as early as possible. The evaluation of any individual, however important, should not be made a precondition of re-unification.

Next comes the task of unity with all fraternal groups outside the CPI (ML)

who ideologically subscribe to Marxist-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought and are eager to develop armed peasant struggle. This task has no contradiction with the reorganisation of the CPI(ML). It is my unfortunate experience, direct and indirect, that whenever we talk of the reorganisation of the CPI(ML), some comrades feel injured and insulted and try to invent some plot or remnant of sectarian policies. This is a legacy of the past. We had practised a policy of closed doorism dogmatically towards these comrades, treated them with contempt, as almost counter-revolutionaries and behaved with them with arrogance. This was wrong. Sincere and open-hearted self-criticism on our part will clear the atmosphere and pave the way for understanding and mutual respect. A responsible leadership should be patient in resolving all honest political differences. To put politics in command means essentially to put revolution in command.

On the other hand, these comrades should be told clearly and firmly that liquidation of our Party can never be a precondition for unity with them. They should be told that they made a mistake by not joining the Party in 1969. Today we shall invite them to join the Party. The door of mutual discussion shall remain open; we shall maintain a close liaison and try to synchronise all our actions with theirs, as far as possible, keeping the independence and initiative of the Party intact.

Then there are other parties, groups and individuals with whom unity, albeit partial, temporary and relative, will be necessary. This necessity will be determined by historical conditions. The Party should lay down a policy in this respect.

We should try to unite as far as possible with all parties, groups and individuals who (1) pursue a policy of anti-hegemonism against the two superpowers; (2) stand for alliance with China and other Third World countries; (3) work genuinely for the interest of the people, particularly the working class and peasantry. In our country where armed revolution is faced with armed counter-revolution, the attitude towards armed struggle is closely linked with this criterion.

'The Clean Old Man

AKIO YAMAKAWA

THE choice of Miki Takeo as Japan's next Prime Minister was unexpected. Most observers felt sure that one or the other of the powerful faction leaders—Fukuda or Ohira—would emerge victorious from the complex party in-fighting, and the agreement on the much less powerful Miki seemed almost like a magic trick.

In retrospect it is clear that choice of one of the more powerful figures might have split the Liberal Democratic Party at a time when it vitally needs unity. But Miki is more than simply a "consensus candidate", and his selection reveals a great deal about both the troubles faced by the LDP and the party strategy to overcome these troubles.

In announcing Miki's nomination, LDP Party Vice-president Shiina Etsusaburo offered two reasons for the choice: (1) he is "clean", and (2) he has the "philosophy and courage to fight and overcome long-standing evils in the LDP." Indeed, Miki has a "progressive image" in the context of the LDP.

Of course he has been a Diet member continuously since 1937, but during the war he is known to have "quarreled with the Tojo Cabinet, and during the Occupation he briefly formed his own party (the National Cooperative Party), espoused the doctrines of Robert Owen and criticised the Yoshida Government for its excessive pro-Americanism. He participated in the Socialist Katayama Cabinet in 1947 and was an early advocate of normalising relations with China.

Such "progressive" positions as these had always kept him out of the LDP main current, and he was defeated three times in bids for the LDF presidency.

But "image and reality are not the same. The corrupt financial practices and business connections that ended Tanaka Kakuei's premiership are what the LDF is all about, and Miki would not be a politician in that party were he not involved in the same thing. Among party professionals, Miki's reputation is that of a good swimmer in the swamp of the

ruling party's politics, a kind of "Balkan politician" who keeps his small faction alive by tenacious intriguing.

Like all LDF politicians he is kept afloat by certain business interests. Important Miki faction supporters are Sumitomo Bank President Hotta Shozo, Fuji Bank President Iwasa Yoshizama, Tokyo Electric Power President Kikawada Kazutoyo, and Inayama Yoshihiro, a top leader of Nippon Steel. Moreover he is related by marriage to Anzal Masao of Showa Denko, Anzai Hiroshi of Tokyo Gas, important LDF leaders and even the imperial family.

Whatever one might say about this record, Miki is as clean and progressive a man as the LDF can dig up. Nevertheless it is symbolic of the LDF's waning popularity that a "progressive" as well as clean candidate is called for. Put into power by the party's right-wing forces, Miki is an experiment in right-wing rule under a progressive mask, a preview of the day when the right will have to try to maintain its power through a genuine coalition government. In this connection it is significant that one of the important theoreticians in the Miki faction is Ishida Hakuei, a leader of the New Right who argues that the LDF should seek to arrest its historic decline by cooptive compromises with the labour movement.

But Miki will not be able to get far on image alone. Soon he is going to have to start producing results. In domestic affairs he will try to make conciliatory gestures toward the opposition parties and other gestures toward LDF reform. In foreign affairs he will try to normalise relations with China further

For Frontier contact

VISALANDHRA

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Srikakulam,

A. P.

... may serve as the three
... for unity at present. Why
... everyone of the three criteria
... is a matter of detailed dis-
... (L). In
... Independence and initiative
... any kind of united front must
... maintained. In the present interna-
... national situation any kind of
... about with the force of imperialism
... and with the forces of social-
... in particular is ruled out:
... of front, incompatible with our
... line, is politically harmful.

... of all the apparent divisions
... ideological disorder, the ever in-
... march towards inevitable unity
... revolutionary forces is militantly
... We had no experience of a setback
... Now, the Party has successfully
... a severe one. Politically, we
... a much stronger position at present
... any time before. We, Marxist-
... should always study all phe-
... in development. The present is
... of the tortuous but bright path of
... —the path of liberation of

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while trying to keep Soviet hopes alive.

The right-wing will object to none of this, but will also press him to support pro-Taiwan and pro-South Korea policies. One notorious Korea lobbyist has said that he expects Miki to be an effective channel both for promoting cooperation with South Korea and also for setting limits on some of that government's "spoiled demands on Japan".

Miki's most difficult task, however, will be dealing with the U.S. His diplomatic policy will of course hinge on the U.S. alliance, but he is also notably pro-Arab. Whether he can discover a way to fulfill the promises he made to the Arab States on his trip there last year without antagonising the U.S. Government (which is said to be prepared even for military intervention to protect its oil interests) is a question which may determine the length of Miki's stay in office.

Then there is inflation. If he cannot slow the 27 percent annual inflation rate, the LDF will suffer in the local elections this year. And if the LDP's electoral base erodes even further, someone may find it convenient to "expose" Miki's election. It is convenient to "expose" Miki's financial connections with Sasagawa Ryoichi, the notorious "godfather" of the right wing.

Possibly because he knows the difficulties that lie ahead of him, Miki has several times since his nomination asserted, "I carry a cross on my back".

But he isn't that clean.

For Frontier contact

PABITRA KUMAR DEKA,

Assam Tribune,

Gauhati-3,

Assam.

A Tricentenary Tribute To John Milton

HIREN GOHAIN

IT is a pity that the death centenary of John Milton in 1974 passed without attracting notice in our country. The reaction against comprador culture may go too far. Besides, in his own life-time Milton already became something of a European celebrity, a man with a mission and a message not to be cramped within narrow national frontiers. The most active part of his life was spent in dedicated service to the cause of the first democratic revolution in history, and the content of his poetry — because rather than in spite of the contradictions — sprang from his profound commitment to the ideals of the revolution. We who live in a different revolutionary epoch may well find in him themes and passions that speak to us more intimately than the arcane mysteries of symbolists who have long dominated the scene.

Not that this perspective is easily won from the clutches of crabbed scholarship. I still remember my bewilderment when I tried to find a supervisor for my research for a Ph.D degree on Milton's poetry way back in 1965. No one seemed to be interested in Milton. My frantic search provoked pitying or amused smiles, and that was in Milton's own university, Cambridge. F. R. Leavis was still around, and the English scholars seemed to be more awe-struck by Leavis's crusade against Milton than by Milton himself. If one is allowed to strike a personal note, I may even murmur that my dissertation flew in the face of academic prejudice that had been built up in the decades since the thirties. It was possible for me to have that perspective for the simple reason that I was not a student of English literature in that particular milieu, that in fact I had gone from a country where there were simmering revolutionary possibilities.

With the exception of one or two scholars like Don M. Wolfe most of the critics and scholars of Milton have been men without any interest or involve-

ment in public affairs. They have been professors with sedentary habits, and critics lacerated by private frustrations and cultivating a distaste for politics as a vulgar activity. The radiance of Milton's attitude of admiration was set by the example of men of an altogether different kind: Dryden, Johnson, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth — all of them had an intimate acquaintance with or knowledge of the major political forces or events of their own time. But Eliot and Pound and Leavis were at best at the periphery of the actual politics of the time when they launched their holy war against Milton. Hence their utter blindness and inactivity to the main theme and concern of *Paradise Lost*: liberty, its character and conditions.

The holy war of Eliot and Leavis to mention the numerous epigons, diverted attention from the main source of strength and inspiration of our poetry to a focussed if on his obvious weaknesses. A man who knows Milton's work inside is horrified by the patronising and petty minds with a deadly literalness approach sweat out their work of dissection. A. J. A. Waldock and Peter, to name only two, rip apart Milton's epic with the same misguided roughness as Tolstoy displayed in pointing out the alleged inconsistencies and contradictions of *King Lear*. Eminent critics like Wilson Knight and others have pointed out that Shakespeare's *King Lear* was not interested in historical consistency or naturalistic verisimilitude but poetic, symbolic truth. It is a pity that prestigious scholars have thought it fit to read *Paradise Lost* as a medieval fairy tale, demanding from its readers that sort of attention.

Textual criticism, the passion of contemporary critics, is hardly free from bias and preconception. If we attack Blake's poetry with the same deadly literalness as our happy critics bring to bear in their

we may very well produce
like the following:

Can a tiger 'burn' at night? It
is hunting its prey only because
it must burn or become conspicuous

A group of devoted critics who work-
ing with sincerity were as assiduous in dis-
cussing Milton's failures, and their
or political advisers in our country parrot the
stratagems of flattery with gusto.

The political scholar of Blake, S. Foster
Damon points out that Blake had illus-
trated the words with loving care all the chief works
of the poet except *Samson Agonistes*. In
Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* Milton, whom Leavis had
had some 'lodged with very little fuss' by
the poet significantly shares a place of pri-
ority with two other immortals, Chaucer
and Shakespeare. Foster Damon remarks:

Blake was the first person, and until
then the only one, to recognize that
Milton was a symbolic poet. The great
and interested readers took *Paradise Lost* as
concerning an expansion of biblical history
rather than as a poem, however knew that Milton

was to say 'Things unattempted
Leavis, in *Case of Rime*; he read the stories
of Adam and Eve and Adam as profound studies
source of the processes of Sin and Milton's
poet as of Heaven and Hell were written
weakness especially about Man, who contains
work from (in *The Poet as Visionary*, ed.

W. R. Inge, D. E. Pinto). We need not worry
with what he said about the metaphysics of Sin
and the remark above. After all, pious
of the church have long complained that Milton
and John Donne's salvation and sin; Milton's
apart from the world presents man's destiny
guided through good and moral terms, not in theo-
retical in expansion. Incidentally, religious lan-
guage and imagery as the characteristic idiom of that
poet critics and even Gerard Winstanley, the
hit and adherent of the Communist sect, the Dig-
keshire man speaks of his social and political
ed in literature as parables with Adam and Eve
erisimilitudo.

It is a poet
ave thought of Milton as 'Man of Will'
as a magnificence in his reactionary phase Gole-
from its only source the essence of Milton's
more firmly than many of our
mission of our contemporary savants. Comparing the
bias and prejudice of the Elizabethans with the luminaries
Blake's poetry in the Puritan era, he remarks that the
ness as some of our daily outshone the latter with
in their attainments of equality and brilliance, but, on

the other hand among the latter "there
was a vehemence of will, an enthusiasm
of principle, a depth and an earnestness
of spirit, which the charms of individual
fame and personal aggrandisement could
not pacify,—an aspiration after reality,
permanence, and general good—in short,
a moral grandeur in the latter period,
with which the low intrigues, Machiavel-
lian maxims, and selfish and servile ambi-
tion of the former, stand in painful
contrast". ("Lecture on Milton"). After
pointing out that Milton's milieu com-
bined the influence of the Elizabethan
period with that of its austere successor,
he thus describes Milton's personal char-
acter: "In his mind itself there were
purity and pity absolute; an imagination
to which neither the past nor the present
were interesting, except as far as they
were called forth and enlivened by the
great ideal, in which and for which he
lived: a keen love of truth, which, after
many weary pursuits, found a harbour
in a sublime listening to the still voice in
his own spirit, and as keen a love of his
country, which, after a disappointment
still more depressive, expanded and soared
into a love of man as a probationer
of immortality". The memorable last
lines of *Paradise Lost* do indeed present
man as a probationer, but not so much
of an immortal fate as of a specific hu-
man destiny, of liberty which must be
preserved by care and sacrifice.

Milton liked to remind the readers of
his prose works that he had written them
but with his left hand, and that his true
vocation was that of a poet who would
celebrate the glories of an awakened
England, witness of 'God's work for man'
in his time. In our secular language we
should call it England's world-historical
role in the 17th century. But the prose
tracts and pamphlets struck a mighty
blow for that work against the twin bas-
tions of reaction: despotic monarchy set-
ting at defiance the powers of the Com-
mons, and the Episcopal Church that
would fetter man's conscience with its
empty ceremonies and hierarchies. The
great tracts—*Reason of Church Govern-
ment*, *Areopagitica*, *Tenure of Kings and
Magistrates* and the resounding Latin
Defense of the English People—rolled
like a lava of impassioned rhetoric to
overwhelm the enemies of enlightenment

and freedom. As Latin Secretary of the
Commonwealth, present-day equivalent
of a Foreign Minister to a revolutionary
government, he spent diligent hours por-
ing over documents and inditing letters
until his eyesight failed him. When after
Cromwell's death the generals were plan-
ning to recall Charles II as the King of
England Milton wrote 'A ready and easy
way to establish a true commonwealth'
to stem the tide of monarchical sentiment,
though without success.

The revolution was abortive. The
generals and the gentry of England found
it more profitable to invest in a monar-
chy shorn of its powers, and certainly
thought it safer than the opinion of an
awakened multitude open to the influ-
ence of radical groups like the Levellers
and the Fifth Monarchy men. Milton
lived to see God's work in England go
all awry, betrayed by a people who had
proved themselves unworthy of the great
trust. The returning Royalists were ex-
acting cruel vengeance. Cromwell's
body was disinterred from its grave, and
his head placed on a stake on the battle-
ments of the Tower. Sir Henry Vane
and others faced death and imprison-
ment. Milton went underground, with
his property under a decree of confisca-
tion. There were renegades and traitors
in plenty. Milton saw the decline
and fall in moral terms, as a consequence
of lack of self-control. He was embittered
by the venality of the Generals and
the vacillating loyalties of the populace.
But though robbed of hope he did not
abandon faith. He sets the attainment
of liberty in a millennial future. And
the tension between his surging hopes,
tended for years, and the grim sequence
of events that finally dashed them to
the ground, finds expression in the epic
poem where poetry salves the pain of iso-
lation, grief and despair. The famous
invocations to the Muse at the beginning
of some of the books of *Paradise Lost*
take it up as a refrain: Standing on
Earth, not rapt above the Pole.

More safe I sing with mortal voice,
unchang'd

To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on
evil days

On evil days though fall'n and evil
tongues

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The task has not been easy. Getting in-stand by the side of the victims irrespective of their ideology.

The task was not easy. Getting information and instructions from the prisoners, organising legal defence in various courts, acute financial and numerous other problems, specially in a regime of police terror, stand in our way. But a large number of friends, sympathisers, and democratic-minded people and organisations have cooperated

During the past two years the committee has participated in various democratic movements to demand the release of all political prisoners and protect the civic and democratic rights of the people at large.

The committee knows that very little could be done so far and that our efforts barely touch the fringe of the vast prob-

lem. The committee appeals to progressive and democratic people and organisations to set up support groups in their respective neighbourhoods in order to provide continuous help to the committee.

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In darkness, and with dangers com-
past round,

And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visitst my slumbers nightly . . . (Book
VII).

It is the moment of loss, defeat, cor-
ruption of original innocence that finds
memorable expression in the poem time
and again:

So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the Fruit, she plucked,
she eat;

Earth felt the wound, and Nature from
her seat

Sighing through all her works gave
signs of woe,

That all was lost.

How art thou lost, how on a sudden
lost,

Defac't, deflowrd, and now to Death
devote?

But its counter-point is a vision of the
original goodness of creation, its benefi-
cence and bounty for man, glimpsed in
the musical "Rose as in Dance the state-
ly Trees" or in the swarms of fish that
"sporting with quick glance/Show to the
Sun the wav'd coats dropt with gold".

Satan is now considered a more com-
plex figure than the cardboard monster
that amused the thirties. The very con-
ditions of liberty go into his making. But
he removes the positive content of liberty
— which is but service of man and the
world — to replace it with the worship
of his own will. That is why he burns
with fierce but barren desire while Adam
and Eve enjoy love "imparadised in one
another's arms".

The charge of a lack of human inter-
est in *Paradise Lost* dates from Dr John-
son's times, and it means no more than
a lack of interest in bourgeois domesticity.
But the central story is instinct with love
and betrayal, forgiveness and reconcilia-
tion, to make it sufficiently human. Be-
sides, Milton sees what is obscure to pur-
blind pedants — that politics may be the
arena where the human soul is formed out
of struggle, at least in certain historic
epochs.

Black Light

SANDIP SARKAR

PRAKASH Karmakar has all along
tried to explore the possibility of
visual language by a search for images
which would be capable of communica-
ting contemporary themes. His
work has never lacked archetypal under-
currents, yet he is a figurative painter
who has steered clear of surrealism. His
one-man show at the Birla Aca-
demy (December 24 to January 5)
proved once more that he had progres-
sively changed for the better. He calls
his theme "Black Light"—light that can-
not bear the onslaught of darkness and
despair and almost becomes black. In
28 canvases, neither too large nor too
small, he treats this theme and improvi-
ses as he goes along.

He makes use of genuine Indian vis-
ual sensibility, for let us admit that like
the genius of any language, there is such
a thing as a geographical variance of
visual language. Man in general and
woman in particular have always been
used in art as an object of adoration, as
a symbol and an imagery. In Indian
sculpture and painting the human body
is highly stylised, but never seems to lack
the breath of life. Indian artists have
always been fascinated by ample breasts
and heavy hips. Prakash takes over
from his ancestors this fascination for
the female body, but in the process the
image breaks up into fragments. The
broken pieces scatter and arrange them-
selves. There are signs of torture and
lacerated agony. Sometimes he uses
these dismembered limbs as silhouettes
on the flat surface of the canvas.

He varies his imagery and starts from
one of known ones — that of a woman
being trampled by an untamed horse—
and goes on to use a bouquet, which
looks less like flowers and more like hu-
man beings, well-rounded breasts, preg-
nant bellies, hips, exposed wombs which
look like tombs in a cave, and lips or
eyes. There is sometimes a brief candle
enveloped in darkness. He has com-
pressed and minimised and a blob of
green is enough to suggest a tree, while

any member of the human body may
suggest a person. His significant use
of the torso is breath-taking. In his
painting he uses the reclining nude wa-
men, with suggestions of drapery
in curved lines and a cigarette at the
top of the canvas to indicate a man
and also possibly the act of copulation.
Sometimes the body becomes thin and
breasts and the belly become thin and
ples and the rest of the body turns into
a jug and all these arrange and then
form themselves into a still life.
By a sinister process, everything
of death, decay and alienation. Even
in this morbid state Prakash never loses
faith, he makes us witness program-
lies and even birth pangs.

He is accurate and neat and the
torial arrangement is elastic but
He has tried to judge and modify
inner urge, to be precise in his lines
and lucid in his linear movements. His
coloured areas are well demarcated
he has poetically mixed and overlaid
colours with a preference for bright
hues and this reminds us of the
que of wash. Here and there one
some similarities with pastel effects.
the overall impression is that of oil
with restraint. Brushwork is subtle
for the most part.

His composition, stylisation and use
colours are quite unexpected, but he
everything known a little twist to
cate the decay of society and its
and tries to make the moral crimi-
nificant in visual terms. The only cri-
sm I have is that the colours are
times a bit too sweet. In spite of
I would say that this is one of the
exhibitions I have been to in the
five years.

CORRECTION

It was of course "Rigmorole", and
"Digmarole" (p. 1 and p. 14 of
December 28 issue). The proof was
not read.

By

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Spartacus

BY A DRAMA CRITIC

THOMAS Fast's novel *Spartacus* was dramatised and staged at the State School of Fine Arts by the well known group 'Chetana'. The immortal story of the slave revolt in the days of the Roman Empire is part of our inborn cultural wardrobe and the story thereof need not need retelling. The production itself was forceful and compelling and the performance of the various actors was of a consistently high standard.

Bankar Ghosh gave a fine rendering of Spartacus and brought out first the agony of indecision and later the rebellious spirit of rebellion that triggered the slave revolt and led to such successes in the initial stage. In his Christ-like appearance and aloofness, possessing his charisma, Spartacus was crucified in the end only to remain etched in our memories as the last hope of the slaves. Gourangajiban Das, as Draba, the invincible black gladiator, moved us with his natural ferocity which later turned into a feeling of sympathy and open defiance of his master under the looming shadow of an impending slave revolt—the result of direct contact with Spartacus who sowed the seeds of discontent wherever he went.

Samir Mukherjee as Batiatus the owner of the gladiators was very convincing as a vicious, bloodthirsty tyrant and the epitome of the pagan civilisation that was then at its peak. Kajal Chowdhury as Verenia, originally a female slave attached to Batiatus' entourage and later Spartacus' wife, was a mixture of gentle femininity and quiet courage and qualities eminently suitable for one who was to become Spartacus' partner in the quest for freedom.

It seems that the group spent a lot of money and used considerable imagination towards creating very authentic and elaborate Roman costumes. The stage set left no doubts as to the time and place of the action. The scenes enacted by the silent workers in the Nubian gold mine conveyed very eloquently the utter dejection

and sense of oppression which mere words could not have brought out with such conviction. Equally powerful and mesmerising was Draba's wordless revolt with a trident in his hand and his charge at the audience in the arena.

This play was not merely an echo of the forgotten past. The statements made and the emotions evoked have a very special relevance to current conditions in our country today. The rule of the privileged few continues merrily at the expense of the land slaves and the wage slaves. One can also discern a smouldering sense of acute discontent spreading amongst the people. Are we not then waiting for a modern Spartacus to light the fuse and deliver us from our insidious manacles?

Letters

Aberrations

As the crisis deepens in our country, aberrations of all sorts show up everywhere. Lately, cabaret dances and plays with an accent on sex have invaded the respectable middle class areas of Calcutta. Cabarets have normally been associated with Western-oriented night clubs and snooty restaurants in certain select areas of the city, but today Bengali plays with an eye on the takings have begun to introduce grotesque dances by flimsily clad women for the titillation of the audience, which, by no stretch of imagination have any artistic or aesthetic appeal. Upper class Westernised Indians with a hybrid and artificial life style may thrive on these importations but why cultured middle-class audiences, solidly Indian in their outlook, must be treated to such deplorably vulgar acts seems difficult to understand. This makes me suspect a preconceived plan by the authorities to carry out a successful cultural subversion and distract the minds of the impressionable young who may want to question the very basis of that authority which gives our government the right to impose a fraud on the people and unleash a reign of terror to attain its short term objectives.

It is a fact that vast quantities of young men today have no idealism left

to fall back on and willingly let themselves be used as cannon fodder by a cynical and ruthless establishment in the interminable power game which goes on. Unemployed, rootless hardened by adversity, insufficiently politicised, these young men are provided with drugs, alcohol, women, and debased cabaret dances to keep them on the leash. This can only happen under a system which is fast disintegrating under the pressure of its own contradictions and has totally outlived its utility.

It is a lasting tragedy for us to want to copy the utterly bogus and debased life style of the decadent West under the active encouragement of a vicious and cold-blooded establishment. That too few are aware of the sinister campaign to corrupt the morals of the young and thus stifle revolutionary initiative and quell the mounting disaffection amongst them shows to what lengths the government can go to prop itself up. If such catering for the base desires of the human heart isn't one form of successful counter-insurgency, what is?

Samir Mukherjee
Calcutta

'Balaka'

The name of the group mentioned in the drama review of December 21 is Balaka Silpi Gosthi. Ajit Mukhopadhyay was on crutches and Dulal was the militant factory worker.

Somnath Nath
Balaka Silpi Gosthi, Calcutta

Who Pays ?

I wonder how Mr Rudra in his 'Price Policy for Promoting Inequality' (December 7) could say that practically nobody except foreign tourists pays from his pocket. This is not the fact; a large number of IAC passengers who travel between Calcutta and other parts of the Eastern Sector pay from their own pockets. Specially, Agartala passengers. But it is true that the maximum number of IAC passengers travel on expense account.

A Worker of IA,
Barisa, Calcutta

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Rigmarole', and p. 14 of