

Book Reviews

A

LEARNED 'BANDIT'

India from Primitive Communism to Slavery. By S. A. Dange. (People's Publishing House, Bombay, Rs. 2.)

PREMIER NEHRU, fresh from his rapturous reception by the New York Stock Exchange, has been engaged in denouncing the Indian Communists as 'bandits', 'assassins', 'thugs', 'dacoits' and all the other familiar terms of abuse reserved by the venerable tradition of the British Home Department in India for Indian patriots. From the heights of his profound Harrovian wisdom he has found the Indian Communists 'stupid'. From the triumphant climax of his retention of India in the British Empire, and attaching of India to the Anglo-American war chariot (with consequent expenditure of half the Indian Budget on military purposes) he finds the Indian Communists, with their demand for independence, 'anti-national'.

Meanwhile one of the best known leaders of the 'bandits', S. A. Dange, President of the All-India Trade Union Congress, who has led the Indian masses in struggle for over a quarter of a century, and is well known to trade unionists in this country, especially among the miners and textile workers, has published a book from jail. With typical debased instincts, pandering to the lowest lusts and passions, he has devoted his book to a study of prehistoric and ancient sociological development in India from the epoch of primitive Communism to the epoch of slavery. 'Anti-national' to the core, and 'wholly alien to Indian culture and traditions', he has had the miserable cunning and effrontery to display in this book a close knowledge and study of the original Sanscrit sources, of the Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads, and of the

traditional Brahminical ritual, which would put many professional scholars to shame.

It is indeed in the best tradition of Marxist scholarship that such a work should have been produced from jail. The book was mainly prepared and drafted in Yeravda Jail in 1942-43. When the proofs required to be corrected in 1948, the author was once again a prisoner—this time under detention without charge or trial by the imperialist satellite government. As the publishers explain, this prevented necessary 'consultations with him regarding final revisions of proofs, etc.'. These circumstances, and the consequent limitations of access to materials, must be taken into account in appreciating the achievement the book represents and making allowance for any shortcomings.

It is likewise characteristic of the active militant record of the author that this book by no means represents an academic refuge under prison conditions into the sphere of 'pure' research in a field thousands of years removed from present problems. On the contrary, the importance of the subject, as always in the best historical work, arose from present problems and discussions, and the purpose of the author was consciously practical. He explains in the Preface:

For a short while I had been permitted to mix with Congress prisoners. We had talks, and I found out that unless I went to the root of the matter and gave them an outline of the rise of the classes and the State in Indian society from the point of view of historical materialism, they would not be satisfied. They were fresh young men who were eager to learn and understand.

He shows how successive stages in the treatment of Indian history have corresponded to the polemical purposes, first of imperialism, and then of the Indian national bourgeoisie.

History was used by the Eng-

lish rulers of India to demoralise the rising freedom movement, to build a psychosis in the leadership of the people that compared to world history, its age, its achievement, India and its people were nowhere; and whatever of its history was known led to one conclusion that this country and its people were destined to be always conquered and ruled by foreign invaders. Geography, climate and culture inevitably doomed us to this fate. Serious and responsible historians of the *Cambridge History* and other works propagated this thesis.

Against this the Indian nationalist school of historians sought to glorify and idealise the past of India :

In order to fight it, our historians went to prove that India's history really almost begins world history of present man . . .

Such militant history writing had its use, no doubt, in the struggle against the British power. But just as it gave the Indian Nationalist a certain morale, it also gave him a false sense of values regarding the past and made him venerate everything that was of the past, but had ceased to be of use in the present, or had become a positive hindrance.

So arose the myth of Indian exceptionalism, propagated by Gandhism and similar schools, which sought to find in Indian institutions and traditions a unique self-sufficing eternal culture and philosophy, and to insist that the scientific laws of historical development laid bare by historical materialism or Marxism, however applicable to other countries, could never apply to India. The parallel with the old Narodnik illusions which Lenin had to combat in pre-revolutionary Russia is evident.

The essential purpose of Dange's study of primitive Indian conditions is to destroy this mythology, and to demonstrate that the laws of historical materialism apply equally to the development of Indian society.

As yet there has neither been a serious presentation of Indian history from the point of view of historical materialism, nor a serious refutation of such a view . . .

It is my firm opinion that the vast storehouse of Hindu mythology and religious/social laws and practices, if read and sifted on the basis of historical materialism, would yield a consistent and rational picture of India's ancient history, though it will not be to the liking of the Hindu orthodoxy or bourgeois philosophy. It will then appear that the law of historical materialism, the law that productive forces and productive relations determine man's history through the ages, is valid for India, too, for the past, the present and the future.

Once this essential polemical purpose of Dange's courageous and thought-provoking study is understood, its high value as a pioneering work of contemporary Indian Marxist scholarship can be justly appreciated.

Dange's book is a pioneering work in an enormous field of study in which a vast amount of further research and examination of evidence will be necessary to reach firm conclusions. Dange's approach is bold, imaginative and stimulating. He opens up far-reaching prospects in the exploration of primitive conditions on the basis of Indian origins, which will merit the most careful attention of students in this field in all countries. If sometimes the generalisations may appear too confident and over-simplified, in relation to the weight of the evidence adduced, or inadequate to the full scope of the problems, there is no doubt that the general approach reflects a consistent and well-instructed Marxist outlook, and that the treatment contrasts with what has been previously current in this field from Indian bourgeois sources as the light of day to darkness or twilight.

The limitations arise from the

pioneering character of Dange's book, no less than from the difficult conditions of its production. He has confined himself almost exclusively to the interpretation of literary and traditional sources, without taking into account the results of archaeological work. Mahenjodaro receives no more than a passing incidental reference in the introduction, and Harappa none. Yet the indications that the city-states of the Indus valley, which flourished in the third millennium B.C., were destroyed by conquest in the first half of the second millennium, would raise serious problems in relation to his timeschedule, no less than with regard to the problems of cultural impact which are ignored in his virtually exclusive preoccupation with Aryan culture. It must be recognised that the author has not had the opportunity to acquaint himself with the results of the more recent work of Soviet Indologists. In the interpretation of the texts and rituals, where Dange undoubtedly opens up many brilliant lines of theoretical suggestion, no less than in the etymological arguments, the final assessment must be left to experts in the field (a careful review by a group of Marxist Indologists in this country will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Modern Quarterly*). But the impression created for the lay reader is that he attempts to build too much on too little; that he selects in an eclectic fashion a few examples of texts and myths from the vast available arsenal in order to construct therefrom a gigantic speculative edifice; and that he relies too much on lengthy citations from Engels to establish the ordered sequence of his argument, fitting in fragments of evidence into the framework provided by Engels, rather than conducting an independent examination of the body of Indian evidence as a whole in order to deduce there-

from conclusions which not only illustrate the general laws of development already established by the science of historical materialism, but also take into account the special forms of social development in India (e.g. the extent to which the survivals of the village-commune organisation modified the forms of development of class forces in India).

To demand so much, however, would be to demand the unreasonable at the present stage and under the conditions under which the author has had to work. Dange has opened up a rich and fruitful field for creative Indian Marxist research. Students of Marx will be aware of the close attention which Marx gave to Indian social development, not only in the modern period, but from primitive conditions, as of the greatest importance for the study of human development, with special regard to the significance of the Indian village commune and its relation to the growth and forms of class antagonisms. In the collection of hitherto unpublished writings of Marx now available in the Soviet Union a whole volume is devoted to Marx's Notebooks on Indian history; and it is to be hoped that this volume may presently be made available in English (a copy of the Russian edition may be consulted in the Marx Memorial Library). The work in which Dange has proved himself a worthy pioneer will go forward; and the collective efforts of Marxist students and theorists in India and other countries will help to clarify many problems which still remain obscure, and, by utilising the weapon of Marxist theory to unlock the problems of Indian social development and interpret its exceptionally rich treasury of age-old myth and tradition, throw a flood of light, not only on Indian conditions, but on the development of mankind.

R.P.D.

THE GREAT TITO CONSPIRACY

Tito's Plot Against Europe. By Derek Kartun. (Lawrence and Wishart, 2s. 6d.)

THE ranks of the 'friends of Tito' movement are growing fast. Churchill and Eden are leading members. The Greek monarcho-fascist chiefs like Venizelos express their gratitude. Mr. Truman and Mr. Acheson are active in the movement which has been swelled by the leading publicists of the West German monopolies and the organ of the French Comité des Forges. In Britain all the capitalist press, *Times* and *Telegraph*, *Sunday Observer*, *Economist*, and even the *Daily Herald*, sing loud his praises to the skies.

Why have all these spokesmen and instruments of dying imperialism rallied to the support of the Tito gang? Not only because he is *their* man, *their* tool, *their* servant. But because when the old right wing parties of reaction, right wing groups of the peasant parties, and the right wing Social-democrats have been defeated and exposed before the people, Anglo-American reaction needs a fresh weapon to try and penetrate the left wing organisations of the Popular Democracies, above all the Communist Parties, and to disrupt and destroy the new popular régimes *from within*. And because in the *capitalist countries*, as the slump develops, and as the workers learn from their own experience the treachery of the right wing labour leaders, capitalism needs new tools, to try to penetrate from the left, under the cloak of revolutionary phrases, into the working class movement, and to spy on it, disrupt, confuse it and divide it from inside. *This is the role they assign to the Tитоites.*

That is why Derek Kartun's new book, the *Tito Plot Against Europe*, is so very timely and so very important. What he has done is to reconstruct the story of the plot

revealed at the Rajk trial, at which he was present, putting the events into chronological order, bringing into vivid relief the main figures of the conspiracy, the main events in the developing plot against peace and against the people of Europe. The book is a fine piece of vivid writing, and no reader who has taken it up will easily put it down again.

Here you see drawn together with great skill all the main threads of Tito's plot against Europe. The Hungarian conspirators led by the police informer Laszlo Rajk, that head of police agents and former fascists who sent hundreds to their death by torture in the days of the illegal struggle, and who in Hungary's new democracy plotted the assassination of the best leaders of the Hungarian people. But behind Rajk and his gang you see Tito and his men, who, having betrayed their own people, become a major instrument of Anglo-American imperialism in its plot against the European peoples. Kartun's book enables the reader to understand *how* the Yugoslav Communist Party leadership fell into the hands of a gang of Trotskyites, agents of foreign reaction, how the betrayal developed in the course of the Second World War, and how the Tito group, organised for treachery by agents of British imperialism during the war, were taken over, once the war ended, lock, stock and barrel by U.S. Intelligence.

But finely painted in the vivid incidents of Kartun's book are the *main* criminals who stand behind Rajk and behind Tito—the forces of Anglo-American reaction themselves. You see at work the dark fraternity of international spies and provocateurs. You see how Hungarian fascist police, Deuxième Bureau of France, German Gestapo, U.S. and British Intelligence, *even when at war with each other*, join hands in using spies and provocateurs against the U.S.S.R., the People's Democracies and against the organisations of the working class. They carry out the