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A CASE FOR INQUIRY

A rebel alive is a CIA agent, a rebel dead is a cherished hero. Charu Mazumdar would have scoffed at the paeans that might be sung of him after his death in police custody much in the same way he had spurned the politics of the parties approved by the establishment. In death he has triumphed, for it was a master-stroke to confound and humiliate his detractors who had been speculating since his arrest on 16 July whether the police had taken their protege under their protective wings. The need for such "intellectual" exercise is easily understood. Here was a man, a nondescript communist, on whom the entire police of the country have been let loose, while redoubtable communist leaders planning revolution on a grand scale are being forced to put on fat because the police would not touch them despite all their fire-eating. The occupation of the establishment communists was threatened by Charu Mazumdar's dare-devilry in attempting to make a revolution, maybe in his own obsessed, egotistic, romantic and twisted way, without the blessings of the State. So he was dubbed an agent-provocateur, or a lackey of U.S. imperialism taking his directions from the arch-lackey Mao, or at least a heretic.

The post-mortem praise is not without a purpose. Not that Mazumdar's new admirers have suddenly seen the light and revised their opinion of him. Now that he is dead, a little praise will harm none. On the other hand, it may go a long way in mollifying the resolute young men who have stood by him till the last. The anaemic left parties of West Bengal suffer from lack of young blood; they want to invigorate themselves with the young Naxalites. They may have a second and a more crafty design. While pouring forth their praise for Mazumdar, most of them have suggested that he died a natural death. What hell would have been raised by these parties if any of their leaders had died in police custody, and that too within a fortnight of his capture after evading the police for three years! Over Mazumdar no question has been locally raised; they have unhesitatingly swallowed the official version that he died "in spite of all possible medical care". They took their cue from the Chief Minister, Mr Siddhartha Sankar Ray, who seems to have broken a convention in making a reference in the Assembly to the death of an outsider. (Even Jaminj Roy's death went unmentioned in the House

because of this convention.) Mr Ray took this extraordinary step only to plead the innocence of his government. The hint was not lost on the parties; they have all echoed the Chief Minister.

Charu Mazumdar was a sick man needing constant medical attention. Among those arrested with him from his Entally hideout was a doctor. A theory in official circles is that he recklessly tried to force the pace of revolution because he knew that he was not given many years to live and work for it. The official version of his death may be true. Yet the average citizen will be intrigued by the fact that the heart that could bear the rigours and tensions of underground life for nearly three years should have been unable to stand the care and comforts provided by the Government for even a fortnight. Mrs Mazumdar herself has knocked out some of the Lalbazar stories of the Government's solicitude for Mazumdar. Once suspicion is allowed to raise its head, many things may appear to fall into place beginning with the Police Commissioner's disclosure to reporters on July 16 that the police surgeon had certified that Mazumdar was "not in an unsatisfactory condition". Did the surgeon's verdict lead to denial of medicines which alone could keep his damaged heart beating? The police themselves have given out stories of Mazumdar's "interrogation". For how many hours did such "interrogation" continue every night? Was his heart strong enough to bear the daily strain? These are questions left unanswered by the statements of Mr Ray and his obliging parties. There will be some people who will continue suspecting foul play; but outside of them there is a large number whose suspicion may be laid if an inquiry is held by a person of acknowledged probity and not by an executive nonentity.
