

Although the music was well composed it was always too loud and stood out independently at times. Why the stereophonic effect was tried one does not know. Costumes were well designed, but the lighting at times was so dull that the gestures and expressions of actors became indistinct and to those in the rear of the auditorium must have been completely lost.

Although it made no particular difference to the play the blonde wigs were not really necessary as the Greeks are by and large a dark-haired people. Also the last vowel 'e' in Greek names is pronounced so that *Antigone* should be *Antigony*.

Yet the play as a whole had great impact and left a haunting impression on the mind. It was well worth seeing.

Letters

The Other Path

I could not help bringing to my mind the line, Pease-pudding hot Pease-pudding cold, of the nursery rhyme while reading your otherwise remarkable editorial 'Plea For Instability' (February 15), immediately after the preceding week's 'The Choice' in which you asked people to vote for the very same leaders who will in all probability 'play it even cooler'. (They have already begun doing so by replacing the slogans of class struggle with that of Centre-State struggle, as if the Centre-State relation and not class relation is the root cause of all our troubles. Thus they flatter the national feelings and prejudices, which is, of course popular). Perhaps you were overwhelmed then by the wave, perhaps you are trying now to extricate yourself.

In any case, the election results are out. The Left CPI in particular is back with a vengeance. West Bengal has returned to a state of uneasy peace. With a vast Left CPI majority in the Assembly, politics have become abruptly lively again—a matter of detecting hairline fissures in supposedly monolithic parties or predicting a potential break-up in nomi-

nally allied parties. And all the outcry against 'Vote' has been ironically answered by the public with the casting of more votes. And the argument by Jyoti Basu, now dizzy with success, that the Naxalbari slogan has not been able to make any dent whatsoever, is on the whole convincing if we take it as final, if we fail to see beneath the apparently solid surface the oceans of liquid matter only needing something to rend into fragments continents of hard rock.

"Yes", as Lenin said, "Marx and Engels erred much and often in determining the proximity of 'revolution... But such errors—the errors of the giants' of the revolutionary thought who tried to raise and did raise the proletariat of the whole world above the level of petty common place and trifling tasks are a thousand times more noble and magnificent and historically more valuable and true than the puerile wisdom of official liberalism." Promode Das Gupta's jibe about the Naxalites as a group of Congress agents, however, is in keeping with his infinite capacity to reduce everything he touches to his own Lilliputian dimensions. Himself dubbed an agent of the Congress — Atulya-Promode entente — during the 1967 election — he sees nothing but agents everywhere. As a political leader, he will bequeath to posterity not a single noteworthy idea, not a single penetrating observation. But he is the leader of the victorious party.

True enough, the Naxalite activities on the election boycott slogan were to an extent enjoyed by the Congress, but so were Lenin's polemics and "splitting activities" against fellow social democrats by the Czarist secret police at one time, with a bitter after-taste, however.

The Naxalites are a handful of pioneers, set to fight the establishment both within and without, occasionally with nihilistic extravagance. Progress is usually resisted by the strong social forces always at work to protect the harmony of the status quo against conflict. To the taunt what else they did except tarring the walls one could say, tarring also is a deed? Vulgar

revolutionism does not know that talking at a particular period is also a deed. This may appear nothing more than propaganda work, but in reality it is extremely practical revolutionary work.

There is no gainsaying the fact that voting was considerable. "Ruggiero is again and again fascinated by the false charm of Alcine which he knows to disguise an old witch—sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything and the Knight-errant cannot withstand falling in love with her anew whom he knows to have transmuted all her former adorers into asses and other beasts". The Indian public is another Ruggiero and election another Alcine. Although pretty old and since 1952 occupying the public stage without interruption, election contrives to remain a novelty and evoke all the hopes that used to centre on an untried and promising youth. Even for the most dedicated Bengali Leftist and reformer the wrench from the womb of safe tradition has been traumatic at some stage or other and so he flings himself at tomorrow with all greater force in overcompensation as a man breaking an old habit discovers a new passion. For the large-scale participation in voting and the 'lam-post' victory for the Left CPI there are many reasons, both positive and negative, but the most immediate and influencing one was the crisis, the unprecedented slump, in the whole industrial complex of West Bengal in the last few months, leading to closures, lockouts, retrenchment and forced early retirement. There was the prospect of more unemployment through proposed automation over and above the huge existing joblessness. There was the spectre of total ruin—whatever surplus one had was gone in buying rice. All this was haunting the Bengali. Finding no other viable alternative—Naxalbari rebels being mere handfuls and without any 'locus standi'—they poured forth all their frustration, helplessness, and anger into the voting boxes—with no job, even rice at 50 paise a kilo will not do—paradoxically enough, in favour of the very same people who are willy nilly acting as a brake in the

working class movement from within. The petty-bourgeois Left CPI, the free traders and national capitalists of the Bangla Congress, the social chauvinist Right CPI coalesced to oppose the Tories, the Congress. It was between this coalition and the Congress that the real electoral battle was fought. Opposed to the Left and Right CPI, free traders, and the Congress and thus opposed to entire official West Bengal were the Naxalites. They have the courage to sacrifice momentary success for more important things. They know that defeat is often more honourable than victory. Among the admirable qualities of the Naxalites, especially the younger ones who fought the establishment, is the temerity with which they burned their boats.

The slogan 'Down with the Vote', is of course a correct one in the main, the total lack of response to it notwithstanding. As Lenin said in his preface to Letters of Marx to Kugelmann—"there are moments in history when the desperate struggle of the masses even for a hopeless cause is essential for the further schooling of these masses and their training for the next struggle". It is better to remain alone like Liebknecht—and that means remaining with the revolutionary proletariat—than to entertain any thought of uniting with people who tolerate blocs with thoroughly unscrupulous politicians. The rank and file activist in the electoral battle is sincere not in the personal but in the class sense. He regarded the matter in a simple way—"I want revolution and don't believe in parliamentary democracy but the Congress will win if I don't vote, therefore I am defending a just cause and not any kind of revisionism at all". It must be explained to a man like this, to those undoubtedly honest broad strata of the masses who voted that this is not a question of one's personal wishes but of mass, class, and political relations and conditions, of the inseparable connection between parliamentary democracy and rule of capital, of the inseparable connection between participation in the administration and betrayal of revolution and that it is

impossible to end the misery without the forcible overthrow of the rule of capital and that "patch up" will not do. The Congress is still the main enemy but the United Front is certainly no longer its revolutionary Opposition, it is "His Majesty's Opposition" or, should I say, Congressmen out of office? In reality UF leaders are both competitors and collaborators at the same time. They compete with the Congress for the allegiance of the people offering some concession in miserable dribbles to get into the gaddi but collaborate with it in opposing Naxalbari and revolution. To them, the socialist republic is an unattainable remote, the overthrow of the capitalist system is equally so, and therefore, it has absolutely no significance for practical present-day politics. Class struggle is recognised on paper but in practice it is hushed up, diluted, attenuated.

For conditions to mature for the revolutionaries and the revolutionaries for them, perhaps the intermediate parties should come to power and expose themselves. True, revolutionary struggle for power is almost absent at the moment in India. Yet there never was more widespread feeling than now that the old parties are doomed, that the old shibboleths have become meaningless, that old watchwords are exploded, that the old panaceas will not act any longer. Thinking men of all classes begin to see that a new line must be struck out and this line can only be in the direction of Naxalbari.

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Economic Programme

It was good of Ashok Rudra to make a quick rejoinder (February 15) to the "Economic Programme" (February 8).

While agreeing with him that "there is *nothing whatsoever* that a UF Government can do on the economic front which can be regarded as a step in the direction of the socialist transformation of society", I think he should change the italics from "nothing whatsoever" to "the socialist trans-