

A Dubious Character ?

The character assassination to which Charu Mazumdar was subjected after his arrest was a disgraceful chapter in the history of the Calcutta press. The campaign was subtle, full of innuendoes ; but countless followers of some of the left parties and also the uncommitted got the impression that the man was more a dubious character than a political leader, an impression which the CPM had tried to spread at the time of the Naxalbari uprising.

Since then, and after Charu Mazumdar went underground, top police officials never tired of telling sympathetic reporters that they knew where he was but would not arrest him. The conclusion was obvious and the reporters had an all-knowing smile when discussing Mazumdar. He was the heaven or hell sent man to break up the mighty CPM. Very few people cared to find out how many heads the CPM had broken in order to consolidate its short-lived power in Dalhousie Square, to what extent this erstwhile partner in the government was responsible for the murderous bitterness.

When Mazumdar was arrested, an enterprising reporter asked the Police Commissioner whether he might not have been killed by the other Naxalite faction had he not been arrested. He said he might have been. The answer to this loaded question was reported as a direct statement by the Police Commissioner and became the basis of analyses of how Mazumdar was arrested and why. He must have surrendered by arrangement with the police. The arrest, it was sought to be proved, was inexplicable. How was it that even hours after the man who had been caught at midday at Maulali and who, under 'pressure of interrogation' gave away the hideout of the leader, Mazumdar continued in his hideout? The fact was ignored that the man was going outside Calcutta to post a number of letters and

Charu Mazumdar had no means of knowing of his arrest. One weekly went to the extent of pontificating that the 'source' meant a man in high confidence of both the party and the police, ignoring the 'pressure of interrogation' on him and all that. Why should a police agent be subjected to interrogation? These contradictions did not matter to the leftist weeklies. Another common query was why the advocate of 'armed struggle' did not fight it out with the police. Revolutionary leaders do get arrested now and then—without whipping out a revolver or sub-machine gun. Why wasn't Mazumdar guarded by a squad in the area? When even the mighty CPM is being forced out of its strongholds and the Chhatra Parishad and Youth Congress are reigning supreme, it is difficult to organise a night watch anywhere.

Other papers played up the way Charu Mazumdar was treated by the police—Class I prisoner, a fan provided, eggs too. The purpose of the Government was to sow confusion among the already confused Naxalite ranks and to hint to the general public that he was a man of the police.

There was a striking unanimity of approach to Charu Mazumdar among the rightist and leftist papers, between Promode Das Gupta and Priya Das Munshi. Could we, on the ground of this unanimity, draw the conclusion that they are all, in their own ways, creatures of the Establishment? Such viciousness about a man after his arrest will perhaps be matched by more of the same after his death in police custody.

Losing Lustre ?

Delhiwallahs are wondering whether Mrs Gandhi is developing cramps after completing, say, the fifty of her innings. She attempted a ministerial reshuffle but made a half-hearted shot. At the Simla summit her tackling of the rather straight balls from Mr Bhutto, on a pitch of her own