

which is largely in the unorganised sector. Further, it has reportedly taken up with the Reserve Bank the industry's plea for extending the period of packing credit from the existing 90 days to 180 days.

India has certain advantages in silk and sericulture, but it still faces pro-

blems on the production front. White Japan has improved its competitive advantage through large-scale mechanisation and China has also followed suit to some extent. In India sericulture is still a cottage industry and almost four million people are dependent on it for their livelihood.

highly militant, secondly, coining to the rural-urban stratifications the tie-up between 'middle caste' sections of the peasantry and the urban working class is no longer as primary as it used to be. The current generation of industrial workers, when they are not second generation urbanites, are often from lower caste poor and landless peasant families. The Indian economy has expanded sufficiently to bring about this change. In regions of strong poor peasant movements, these urban industrial workers exhibit none of the economism of the traditional unionised workers. The workers of Singareni coal mines in Karimnagar and Adilabad districts, most of whom are emigrants from the villages of those districts and Warangal, have turned out to be such a headache to the State that police camps are set up in these mines as frequently as in the villages they come from. The paragraph in Sumanta Banerjee's article about 'landless labourers who join the industrial proletariat' being fatalistic and feudal is extremely one-sided. Even in the absence of organisation, labourers are far from being so passive and inert. Moreover, struggle is not only born of a revolutionised consciousness, it is the best revolutioniser of consciousness. Indeed, Sumanta Banerjee's article is lamentably neglectful of the crucial subjective factor of human activity that mediates between reality and consciousness.

Today the workers of the more 'developed' sectors of the industry are no doubt economist and may be even a bit elitist. But a revolutionary practice that starts with the poor and landless peasantry and their urban extension can certainly create a suction that will draw in all those who create society's material product — the only revolutionary class in modern society. In other words, in transcending Marx to take into account the differentiation engendered among the toilers by imperialism, we have not yet reached a stage, where we need to go beyond Lenin's concept of labour aristocracy' and the strategic corollary (implicit in Lenin and quite explicit in Mao) of the 'backward' liberating the 'forward'. What we lack is not revolutionary theory, but revolutionary practice. That is the real dilemma. But the very alienation from practice involutes upon itself and sets the dilemma on its head, making it appear that what we lack is revolutionary theory. The workers of yesteryear, are very much here; the real question is: where are the revolutionaries of yesteryear ... ?

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LETTER TO EDITOR

Where Are the Revolutionaries of Yesteryear...?

SUMANTA BANERJEE (December 17 and 24-31, 1983) is bold as usual, but he appears to be in search of the wrong object. Alienation can produce rebels, but not revolutionaries. A rebel merely destroys, but a revolutionary destroys *and* creates, i.e., he transforms. If Marx were in search of destroyers he would have certainly found them in the 'social scum'. It was because he searched for revolutionaries that he identified the proletariat as the agent of social change. It is no rhetorical oversight that the Communist Manifesto describes the lumpen proletariat as both a 'dangerous class' and a 'passively rotting mass'.

As Sumanta Banerjee no doubt recognises, for Marx the centrality of the proletariat lay not merely in that its very conditions of existence made it an organised and disciplined force. That is just one side, and the lesser side of the matter. The more important side is that of all the classes in Capitalist society, it is only the proletariat whose class position and interest was supposed by Marx to impel it to create Socialism — the collective organisation and appropriation of social production on the basis of the most advanced knowledge built over five thousand years of civilisation. The production relations can be transformed from one variety of exploitation to another by an exploiting class but property-less producers alone can transform them from exploitation to collective appropriation. And this transformation can preserve the achievements of history only if it is led by the industrial proletariat, which is heir to the premises (if not the full extent) of the fruits of modern knowledge.

Intellectuals, to the extent that they too are sellers of labour power, can and do partake of this process, but here we need to take account of one peculiarity of this species, a peculiarity that only the Chinese Cultural Revolution attempted to come to grips with: it is

by and large robbed of property in the means of production by Capitalism, but preserves the monopoly of intellect that was among the first consequences of the birth of private property. Pauperised of property, it preserves the spiritual reflex. Forever lamenting the appropriation of its knowledge by the ruling class, it was itself born, and continues to reproduce itself, in the appropriation of intellect from the labouring people. It is perhaps this duality that makes intellectuals what they are: carping servants of the ruling class and doubtful friends of the masses. Far from being revolutionaries, 'alienated' intellectuals are not even serious rebels. This is true also of the even more amorphous body called 'students', Sumanta Banerjee wants us to heed hard facts. Let us by all means do so. Any careful observer of these sections and their rebellions will admit that it is only in times of serious peasant struggle that student movements have also been serious and steadfast Metropolitan student radicalism (born of curricular alienation) has never survived the first visit to the police lock-up.

It is no doubt true that under imperialism the proletariat is highly stratified and perhaps to some extent even atomised. Collective action for the collective appropriation of the means of production no longer appears to be equally in the interest of all strata of the working class. But to counterpose the workers' apparent disinterest in owning the means of production to the peasants' desire for land is to make nonsense of the problem, for in one case we are speaking of collective ownership and in the other case of private ownership. Nevertheless the dilemma remains, and demands a closer look.

Firstly, militancy *per se*, has no relation to economism or stratification. We have seen highly economist and sectional struggles that have been