We Shall Have Our Own Mandelas

Birth of the 'Political Prisoner' in India

K Balagopal

This is not a futuristic scenario, not an essay on how 'the TADA can be misused'. This is an account of what is already largely happening over an increasingly large area of the country, and with respect to an increasingly large category of political activists, activists of the oppressed nationalities and minority communities, activists of revolutionary groups, activists of militant trade unions and tribal activists.

IT is no longer a very daring thing to talk about the Fascisation of the Indian State; almost everybody who has learnt to spell that word does so, including a number of people whose credentials in this regard are so suspect—the reference is not merely to A K Sen and V P Singh—that it is a surprise that they are bold enough to risk a democratic posture in public. However, if one filters out the violence from their language, there is little that can be called analysis of the structure and instruments of the Fascisation. Usually it just boils down to the single-point rhetoric that we have been listening to since the days of the Congress split: the despotic family rule of the Nehrus, seen as becoming less and less legitimate and more and more difficult to sustain without a repressive state apparatus, as the successive generations of the family exhibit a progressive decline of rectitude and a progressive flowering of ineptitude.

Deeper analysis can wait, but it is necessary to discuss at least the most serious of the instruments of this Fascisation, i e, the ongoing fabrication of a whole new structure to deal with political opposition to the state. Opposition to the state, it must be stressed, as distinct from opposition to the ruling family. Though it is opponents of the ruling family and its party who call upon themselves the exhilarating martyrdom of being the cause of all the repressive measures, the real targets lie demonstrably elsewhere.

'Political Crime'

Central to this structure is the concept of *political crime*, a concept that was hitherto used *defensively* by its sympathisers, and was rejected by the state which argued that there was no statutorily defined notion of political crime in India. Today the concept is very definitely being worked into the legal and political structures as an *offensive* measure by the state. In keeping with Indian hypocrisy, it is not called by its proper name. Hypocrisy apart, it would be violative of Articles 14 and 19, and it is not yet time to set them aside statutorily, though one can play many games with them outside the law books and the courts. And so political crime, defined explicitly and unambiguously as many old crime—or even no crime at all—committed with political intent, is given a different name, or rather two means. One is terrorism, and the other is disruptive activity. The names as well as the 'Objects and Reasons' are chosen evocatively; the picture one gets is that of the planting of explosives operated by the tuning of a transistor radio in a crowded bus or a busy market; and of the second dismembering of the motherland forty years after the first. The statutory definition of political crime is followed up with the erection of a whole new legal and extra-legal structure to deal with it. New hierarchy of courts, new procedures, new restrictions on rights, new treatment in jails, and new weapons to the police—it is a completely new structure, not just a few amendments here and there. It is time we realised that as we enter into the last decade of the twentieth century, India very definitely has two parallel, self-contained and very nearly mutually exclusive structures to deal with 'problems of law and order', one for non-political disorders and one for political disorders, the latter being many times more inhuman and anti-democratic than the former. If political freedom is the defining quality of a democracy then we are no longer even a nominal democracy. The first hint of this situation was contained in the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, (TADA) 1985; it was renewed with a deepening of the meaning when the Act was renewed with amendments in 1987; and confirmed by a Supreme Court judgment of May 1988, delivered by justices A P Sen and L M Sharma, a judgment that is evidently innocent of all knowledge of previous jurisprudence on the 'right to life'.

Let us begin with the definition of Terrorism (sec 3) and of Disruptive Activity (sec 4). It is terrorism if anyone causes or attempts to cause injury or death of a person or destruction of property or disruption of essential services, with the aid of explosives, fire-arms, inflammable substances or other lethal weapons (which, taken together, is in any case a crime under the good old Indian Penal Code, Explosive Substances Act and the Indian Arms Act), if the intention of the crime (it is the *intention* that makes it terrorism) is to overawe the government, create terror in the public, alienate a section of the people, or adversely affect the harmony among different sections of the people. Of these, 'to overawe the government' is a definitive aim of all political activity; and 'alienating a section of the people' is an unavoidable concommitant of any struggle of communities/nationalities which perceive themselves as oppressed, and which is also a political struggle, whether a given perception is true or false. The point is not that the provisions can be misused. The point is that this *is* the meaning of the provisions, that they classify crimes committed with political *intent* as terrorist crimes, and erect a basically new structure for the prevention, investigation and trial of these crimes. The Act need not be misused, for it cannot be used otherwise. This is even more clear in the case of disruptive activity. Section 4 of TADA defines disruptive activity as activity that questions, disrupts or is intended to disrupt, directly or indirectly, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India; or is intended to bring about or is supportive of any claim for the secession or cession of any part of India. Here, there is no need to commit any penal offence, with or without lethal weapons; if you believe in what political theory calls national self-determination you are committing a crime under sec 4, TADA, a crime for which you can be imprisoned for life. For any belief in national self-determination does 'question' the territorial integrity of India.

Legal Sanction for Torture

Now for the structure that has been erected. The difference between this and the structure for ordinary (non-political) crime—which of course includes not only the petty crime indulged in by the indigent people but also the well-organised, politically imperative and financially lucrative crime that is run by people of influence and power—is evident from the beginning

to the end. An accused in an ordinary crime has the right against self-incrimination, which takes the abstract form of the 'right of silence' enunciated by justice Krishna Iyer in the Nandini Satpathy case and the concrete form of the inadmissibility of confessions given to a police officer as evidence in a trial. In a political crime, under sec 15 of TADA (1987), a confession made to a superintendent of police—and recorded in writing, on a tape recorder or any such devise—is made admissible as evidence; and to pretend that this is compatible with the right against self-incrimination requires an uncommon capacity for self-delusion. The police themselves have in any case revealed quite joyously that they regard this provision as a legal sanction for torture. In Andhra Pradesh, where they have learnt to multiply and enlarge every such sanction with their own ingenuity, they were not even extracting specific confessions. Activists and sympathisers of the CPI(ML) groups are arrested, tortured as usual to extract information, and finally forced on point of an 'encounter' threat to put a signature on a piece of white paper. Later, at leisure, the police type out whatever confession they require on the paper and present it to court as part of the evidence.

But that is later. After the 'confession' is over and the wounds have all healed, the accused—if the accused has come out alive—goes to court and from there to jail on remand. Now it is an essential ingredient of civilised criminal procedure that if a person who is only accused of an offence is at all to be deprived of liberty, it rests with the investigating authorities to prove the need to do so, and hence that the courts must review the progress of the investigation at short intervals to ensure that the accused is not being unjustly deprived of liberty. It is from this point of view that the civil liberties movement has been critical of the remand provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), especially since magistrates blindly extend the remand at the end of the two-week remand period without making any attempt to examine the case diary and the progress of the investigation. But now, for political crimes, sec 20(4) of TADA prolongs the remand period to two full months, and no argument or explanation is offered, as if it is self-evident and no argument need at all be offered for depriving a possibly innocent person of the basic right or personal liberty. And the maximum total period of remand—by the end of which either the investigation must come to an end or the accused must be released on bail—has been prolonged to one year, whereas it is 60 days or 90 days for ordinary crimes. In this case too, there is no attempt to justify the new standards by any objective principle or criterion; its only sanction is that those who have enacted the change have the authority to do so, and since they have chosen to do so, we must live with it. What it means is that once a person is arrested in a political crime he or she can be kept securely in jail for one full year, with only six appearance in court; and if, on those six occasions, the police discover that there is not enough of an armed escort to take the prisoner to court, even that formality is not required. The courts, while extending remand of undertrials, are no more insistent on seeing the prisoner than on seeing the case diary. Even in the case of ordinary undertrials, who should not require heavy armed escort, roughly half the extensions of remand are done *in absentia* in our courts.

But this matter of remand is not an isolated instance. As the judgment of justices Sen and Sharma referred to above says: "The Act (TADA) is a special Act and creates a new class of offences called terrorist acts and disruptive activities... and provides for a special procedure for the trial of such offences... There is a total departure from different classes of criminal courts enumerated in [the] CrPC and a new hierarchy of courts is sought to be established" (Usmanbhai Dawoodbhai Memon and others *vs* State of Gujarat, May 1988). In replacement of the multiple hierarchy of courts familiar to ordinary prisoners, for political prisoners there exists, for all practical purposes, only one court: the designated court. It may, and normally does, coincide with the sessions court of the district or the metropolitan area, but that is a matter of convenience and need not be so. Indeed, it is quite likely that soon we will have altogether separate courts for trying TADA offences. From the first remand of the accused till the final judgment and sentence, all proceedings will take place in the designated court; and at no stage till the end can the accused appeal even to the Supreme Court (the high court has been defined out of existence for political prisoners) on any matter pertaining to the proceedings in the designated court. It is only against the final judgment that the accused can go on appeal, and then only to the Supreme Court, and within one month.

The first casualty in this structure is bail. The civil liberties movement has always insisted that bail is a right and not a privilege, and has been critical of our courts which have treated bail as charity. It is indeed possible to interpret the remand provisions of CrPC along with Article 21 to sustain the civil liberties stand in this matter. But now, for offences under TADA, it is made explicit that bail is not just a privilege but a rare privilege indeed. The court is not supposed to grant bail unless it feels that the accused is not only innocent of the crime alleged, but also that the accused will not commit any offence while on bail (sec 20(8)). A full bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, in a recent judgment (Bimal Kaur Khalsa *vs* Union of India), found the latter requirement a little too shocking and held it *ultra vires*; but even the former puts

too much of a burden of generosity on the judge: how is the judge supposed to come to such a magnanimous conclusion before seeing any of the evidence? Indeed, it is a surprise that any of the political prisoners are getting bail at all, and that about a tenth of them *are* getting bail must be attributed less to judicial liberality than to judicial habit. But even so a large majority of the undertrials in political cases remain in jail until the entire trial is over—which can take anything from five to fifteen years, since in these cases a large number of accused, most of them underground inaccessible, are added on with the express purpose of delaying the trial, and the number of witnesses usually runs into dozens if not hundreds. In Andhra Pradesh, for instance, there are at present about 700 political undertrials in the major jails at Warangal, Rajahmundry, Visakhapatnam, Secunderabad, Nizamabad, Karimnagar and Nellore, and most of them are going to be there for many more years to come. They are, of course, entitled to bail at the end of one year's remand, but the courts have been extremely negligent in the matter of releasing undertrials who have overstayed their maximum period of remand. And in the case of political undertrials, the police usually implicate them in a fresh case at the end of the remand period, on the basis of evidence concerning an ancient offence that has miraculously turned up just then; or they take a warrant under the National Security Act just as the remand period is coming to an end; or they rearrest the prisoners as soon as they are released, torture them for a few days, and implicate them in a fresh crime under TADA, by planting a fire-arm or an explosive on them. The prisoners, therefore, have mostly deemed it prudent to stay in jail until the trial is over.

What a Trial!

And what a trial! It is here that the 'special procedure' that justices Sen and Sharma talk about hits you in the face. There is a thorough massacre of all the principles of fair trial and natural justice that are formally present in the case of non-political crimes, though poor persons usually discover that the fairness is only nominal. Firstly, "all proceedings before a designated court shall be conducted *in camera*" (sec 16) unless the public prosecutor, for whatever imbecile reason, wants an open trial. (The Punjab and Haryana High Court has held this provision too *ultra vires*, but only to the extent that the discretion lies with the public prosecutor and not the court; whether the implied substitution, if made, will mean any relief to the accused is a moot point.) But one must be familiar with the lying, cheating and the fabrication of evidence that goes on right inside a court hall to understand the full implications of an *in camera* trial. There is a case now pending with the designated court of Hyderabad which goes by the name of Ramnagar Conspiracy Case, which has 30 accused and more than 300 witnesses. The case attracted attention first because it involves the entire leadership of the CPI(ML) (People's War), second because the poet Varavara Rao was also made an accused in it, though at the time of the FIR in this case was filed he had been in continuous detention for more than six months at the Secunderabad jail, third because the case got into fantastic complications because of the inexcusable carelessness of the prosecution, due to which a situation has arisen where the judge before whom the charge sheet has been filed has no jurisdiction to try the case and it is technically too late to transfer it to the judge who would have had jurisdiction if the 1985 Act under which the case is filed had not lapsed, and fourth because in the midst of all this confusion, one of the main accused, Nalla Adi Reddy, secretary of the Andhra Provincial Committee of the party, chose to run away from jail on the 17th of September this year along with three more comrades, two rifles and a lot of ammunition. The xerox-copied charge sheet given to the accused in this case mentions a conspiracy that is supposed to have taken place in March 1985, whose minutes are supposed to have been kept in the handwriting of one of the Provincial Committee members, A-4 (accused number 4) in this case. But when a bail application was filed for Varavara Rao (who is A-14 in the case), it was discovered that in the typed charge sheet given to the court the relevant portion had been tampered with to replace A-4 with A-14; it was then claimed that since the minutes of the conspiracy were found recorded in Varavara Rao's handwriting, his involvement in the conspiracy was *prima facie* established and so he should not be given bail. If such fabrication of evidence can take place at a stage where the proceedings are still open, it is easy to imagine the plight of the accused once the proceedings become *in camera*.

Secondly, the designated court may not sit at its usual place of sitting (i e, the court hall) but at any place it—or the public prosecutor—wishes (sec 10). For instance it may sit in the jail itself; or it may sit in the heart of a locality populated by the political enemies of the accused. Indeed, the central government may transfer the case from the designated court in whose jurisdiction the alleged crime was taken place, to any court anywhere in the country (sec 11(2)). Thirdly, the identity of any of the witnesses for the prosecution can be kept secret from the accused either on an application from the witness or the public prosecutor, or on the court's own initiative (sec 16(2)). Of course, apart from the public prosecutor's request, the court's initiative can be caused by events entirely external to the court proceedings—like for instance a phone call from the local police superintendent. It is not stated there, but it is evident that if the identity of a witness is to be kept secret, then that witness' evidence, as well as the evidence of other witnesses to the extent that it concerns or refers to that witness, may also have to be kept secret from the accused. Identities cannot be kept secret by merely writing 'X' in place of the person's name.

The remarkable thing about these inequities is that all of them are decided once and for all by a combination of the public prosecutor, the designated judge, and the state or central governments, and the accused cannot go on appeal against these decisions to the high court or the Supreme Court. This is in contrast to the right of appeal that an ordinary prisoner has against any such decision that the court or the government may take. This deprivation of a political prisoner's rights is ensured by sec 19 of TADA, and the elaborate interpretation offered to that section by justices Sen and Sharma.

The structure of Indian statutes is a study in hypocrisy. The actual content, when it is negative in its tendency, is stated in the form of an exception, and sometimes even as a parenthetical sub-clause, whereas what is really meant as an exception is proclaimed as a privilege. Sec 19 reads: ". . . an appeal shall lie as a matter of right from any judgment, sentence or order, not being an interlocutory order, of a designated court to the Supreme Court both on facts and on law". Since, as their lordships point out, everything that happens in the designated court prior to the final judgment and sentence is an 'interlocutory matter', the actual meaning of this section is that: 'there shall be no appeal whatsoever on any matter pertaining to the proceedings in a designated court until the final judgment and sentence are awarded, and then, and only then, an appeal shall lie with, and only with, the Supreme Court'. That is a much more straightforward way of putting it, but those who draft our statutes do not believe in such virtues.

Thus, whether the public prosecutor or the designated judge decides to hold the trial *in camera* and inside a jail or in the courtyard of the political enemies of the accused, whether they decide to keep the identities of *all* the witnesses (and hence also all their evidence) secret, whether the central government decides to shift the case from the designated court of Karimnagar to the district court on north

Lakshimpur on the Brahmaputra river, the accused has no right of appeal against any of these decisior

A New Idiom

While this much can be said to be contained in the act itself, there is a further gloss put on it by the Supreme Court judges. They have taken the extraordinary stand that not only such matters as above but bail is also an interlocutory matter, and therefore there is no appeal against a refusal of bail by the designated court. It requires no intricate *punditry* in jurisprudence to see the absurdity of this notion. If the right to life and personal liberty is a precious right that can be taken away only on grounds that are fair, reasonable and just; if it rests with the authorities to convince the courts that fair and just reasons exist for depriving a person of liberty; if prolonged and unreasonable detention of an undertrial amounts to illegal custody—all of which are assertions made by the same Supreme Court during the last decade—then this understanding that bail be regarded not in terms of the fundamental right of personal liberty and the right against unreasonable restraint, but on par with summons issued to a witness or applications for transfer and such other interim procedural matters, belongs to a different idiom altogether.

But perhaps we should accept that the idiom of judicial discourse *has* changed from the heyday of judicial liberalism of the late seventies, and may be we should wait for one more emergency to see its rebirth. In the meanwhile, we have to face this situation where a political prisoner has to depend upon the mercy of the designated judge of the locality for the realisation of such a basic right as bail. This judge, who is generally going to be a sessions judge of a district town, must manage to convince himself that the accused is not guilty and will not commit offences if released on bail; since no judge—and certainly no judge who can be reached on phone by the local subdivisional police officer—will arrive at that kind of a conclusion without effective advocacy on the prisoner's behalf, the prisoner—a 'terrorist', an 'extremist', an 'insurgent' and what not—must find an advocate living in that district town possessed of enough guts to plead the case—and how many such advocates exist in this or any other country? Andhra Pradesh provides the answer to the question: from the 'extremist-infested' districts, all advocates who would plead with some degree of commitment have been driven out, or have given up their commitment in favour of commercial advocacy, and the pleading on behalf of the CPI(ML) undertrials is done mostly by indigent—and indifferent—lawyers holding state briefs to do the cases for a pittance. The consequences of this for the prisoners' rights need not be spelt out.

And so, locked up in a prison without hope of bail, tried in an improvised court hall located god knows where, denied knowledge of the full evidence for the prosecution, defended by a lawyer paid a nominal amount by the state, the political prisoner has to obtain justice. And to cap it all, whereas in a non-political trial the accused has the basic right of being treated as innocent until the guilt is proved by the prosecution, political prisoners bear the burden of proving their own innocence. In the law for non-political crime, the burden of proof is put on the accused only when the accused pleads some exception, like self-defence in a murder case or truthfulness in a defamation charge; but now politics, apparently, is itself regarded as an exception to the normal rule of acquiescence in the system's inequities.

Of course, there are supposed to be some conditions under which this presumption of guilt operates. The Indian ruling class will not be straightforward even in its meanness. So there are four conditions in sec 21: (a) arms, explosives or inflammable substances are recovered from the accused which, the police (have reason to) believe have been used in the commission of the offence in question. Now, an intelligent person is likely to be struck by the observation that apart from fire-arms, the other lethal substances like explosives and inflammable substances are not likely to survive the crime that has been committed with them. But the police will actually turn this impossibility into a convenience: if, say, a person goes with five explosives in hand to commit a crime with political intent, uses up two of the explosives and is caught with the other three, then that is the same as being caught with lethal weapons used in the commission of an offence, which fact can now be turned upside down: arrest a political activist, plant three explosives on him or her, and claim that these three are part of a larger cache the remainder of which (the police have reason to believe) was used in the commission of a terrorist outrage; and then the burden of proving innocence will fall on the accused. It is to be seen how many designated judges will resist this argument. (b) The fingerprints of the accused are found at the site of the offence or on anything including arms and vehicles used in connection with the commission of the offence. Is it such a difficult thing for the police, once they have you in their custody, to get your fingerprints on to a scooter or some such object which the police have reason to believe was used in the commission of an offence? Surely not. (c) A co-accused has confessed to the offence and implicated the accused. There is no need to comment on this, given the widely known methods the police use to obtain confessions, and given also the fact that now a confession need not mean a confession to a magistrate but can also be a confession to a superintendent of police. (d) The accused himself/herself has confessed to somebody other than a police officer. The word confession is a misnomer here, for what is involved is only an admission made orally or in writing, and evidence of such admissions is not a difficult thing to procure. In summary, then, sec 21 says that whenever the police so wish, the burden of proving innocence falls on the accused.

Prison Regime

This is about the 'trial', so-called. Meanwhile, in prison, the political prisoner again suffers a regime that is palpably different—and much more undemocratic—than that the non-political undertrials suffer. Prisons are supposed to be governed by manuals of rules; these rules usually differ slightly from state to state but all of them belong to a subterranean world that has not heard of things like justice and fundamental rights. The hallmark of the manuals is a total arbitrariness: rules of discipline, procedures for inquiry and award of punishment are all arbitrary. And thus, without any need to define new prison rules for political prisoners, they can be and are being treated as a different category of prisoners to whom even the minimum rights available to ordinary undertrials are not available. They are housed separately and not allowed to mix with the other prisoners in the same jail; they are not allowed to come out of their blocks and participate in the community activities of the prisoners; the letters they write or receive and the newspapers and books they get

suffer excessive censorship, a censorship that has no consideration for the two legitimate concerns of prison administration: the prisoners' rights and the prison's security, but instead is determined by the dictates of the special branch of the police. At interviews that political prisoners have with their families and friends, the presence of the special branch is obligatory, and the prisoners are not allowed to talk anything outside the hearing of the policemen.

As for 'discipline', for the slightest political assertion—whether it is singing songs and giving political slogans or agitating against bad food—they are given corporal punishment, thrown in solitary confinement, or their interviews with their families and even their lawyers are cut for a long time period. In Andhra jails, for instance, it has become customary for naxalite undertrials to observe a programme of protest in their barracks on August 15, while the official flag-hoisting and sanctimonious speech-making are in progress outside under the supervision of the superintendent of the prison. For this they are punished with a prohibition on interviews, withholding of letters and books, and perhaps solitary confinement for the more vocal of them. If they repeat their protest on January 26, they are similarly punished once again. Not only for these symbolic protests on symbolic days, for every act of protest directed against the authorities—about the quality of food, lack of medicines, highhandedness of warders, etc—they receive a similar punishment. The upshot is that most of the political undertrials spend much of their time in solitary confinement, deprived of books and newspapers, and deprived of interviews with friends and family members.

Powers of Eviction

Finally, we come to the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Rules, made with exemplary haste following the passage of TADA, 1987, section 28(c) of which confers power on the central government to make rules which further confer power on a series of officials ('empowered authorities') from the district magistrate upwards to pass general or specific orders to prevent or cope with terrorist and disruptive activities.

The rules appropriate quite astonishing powers. Three categories of places and areas are specified in Rules 5, 6 and 7 for regulation, and quite characteristically, a general power of regulation (of 'certain places and areas') is added in Rule 9. The specific places and areas are prohibited places (premises such as government offices, as defined in the Official Secrets Act), protected places (court rooms, jails, and any other place so declared by the 'empowered authority'), and protected areas ('any area so declared' by the 'empowered authority'). Disregarding inessentials, the substance of the rules is that entry into and conduct in these places/areas is conditional on the issue of a permit by the 'empowered authority' and faithful compliance with the conditions imposed (whatever they may be) as part of the permit. Those who do not possess a permit or do not obey the conditions imposed, can be evicted and in addition imprisoned for six months. The meaning of these rules is worthy of emphasis: *any* district magistrate in *any* part of the country can take over *any* place or area (a building, a *maidan*, a factory, a highway, a village) to the extent of deciding whether *any* given individual (not necessarily one who has any kind of a police record, real or concocted) shall be or shall not be allowed to enter the place or area and impose *any* conditions whatsoever (do not make a speech, do not meet X, Y, Z; do not leave the gram panchayat office; etc) which that person shall obey on pain of instant eviction and imprisonment. And all this in the name of coping with and preventing terrorist and disruptive activities, and entirely on the subjective satisfaction of the district magistrate. It is a remarkable exhibition of brazenness that not even a nominal attempt is made to place seemingly plausible restrictions on the places, areas and persons to whom the rules will apply.

This is not a futuristic scenario, not an essay on how 'the TADA can be misused'. This is an account of what is already largely happening over an increasingly larger area of the country, and with respect to an increasingly larger category of political activists, activists of the oppressed nationalities and minority communities, activists of revolutionary groups, activists of militant trade unions, tribal activists, and even the office-bearers of the policemen's association of Gujarat. There can be any number of opinions about the nature and advisability of the politics of the various victims of TADA, but there cannot be, and should not be, two opinions that this new legal and penal structure that has been silently erected over the last three years is an abomination that we should all collectively fight.

Debt Crisis: Fund-Bank Policies in the Dock

Sunanda Sen

The four-day session of an international tribunal on the world monetary system, held in West Berlin just a month before the IMF-World Bank annual meeting in the same city, underscored the fact that the fate of the working classes is linked across nations. Reduced imports by the South from the North as a consequence of the debt crisis and Fund-Bank adjustment programmes would jeopardise the goal of a decent living for the worker and his family in the North.

WEST GERMANY has been preparing itself for the Fund-Bank meeting which is scheduled to start in the last week of September in the historic city of Berlin. The annual event which is held away from Washington every alternate year has seldom drawn so much public interest. A mood to debate in public and to participate actively in subsequent actions was manifest in the large audience, about four hundred strong, which participated in the Okumenisches Hearing Session on International Monetary System held in West Berlin between August 20-24. The audience wanted information and analysis of the global debt problem, the main agenda in the hearing session. They were each given the relevant papers and a glossary of financial jargon and of course working lunches and suppers as they registered formally as participants. They responded, in increasing numbers and with growing involvements, to the proceedings of the hearing session over the successive days.

The four-day hearing session was designed as a tribunal—where social activists, politicians, journalists, financial experts and officials from national and international bodies met and discussed the global dimensions of the debt problem across a hearing bench. Specific and pointed questions were drafted by the seventeen-member panel of the hearing group which started work a day in advance in order to prepare for the deliberations. The questions were to be put to the witnesses, about thirty in number, drawn from diverse backgrounds and convictions. The moderator of the hearing session, Jan Pronk, leader of the Dutch Socialist Party and a member of the