

# Prosperity under the Dictator

Amlan Datta

THE methods of democracy are dilatory. From this the inference is generally drawn that dictatorship yields quick results. And, not infrequently, the illicit assumption is slipped in that not only are the results quick, but they are also of the desirable variety. People with very different objectives are found to range themselves against democracy, each eagerly believing that under dictatorship what he is aiming at will be readied in the shortest possible time. It is assumed, firmly and unconsciously, that dictatorship is marked out from other systems by its greater efficiency, and has no inherent bias towards any particular set of ends, so that it is good enough for any set. This assumption is so unrealistic that it has only to be stated to be dismissed. But people prescribing dictatorship for utterly different ends are rarely found to be perturbed by the divergence of the goals proposed. The psychological explanation is to be found possibly in the fact that each creates the hypothetical dictator after the image of his own desires.

In underdeveloped countries, with a painfully low standard of living, quick development and a rapid rise in the standard of living are naturally the ends most anxiously sought. The rise in the standard of living is the end, quick development: the means to that end. Disgusted with the inefficiency of prevailing forms of democracy, many rush to the conclusion that dictatorship holds the key to the earliest solution of the problem of poverty. Yet the idea that dictatorship, or one-party rule, can lead the country to a high standard of living in the shortest possible time has no warrant in facts, and is possibly little better than wish fulfilment, a vain hope born of despair.

There are instances in modern history of a country having experienced rapid industrialisation under the rule of a dictator: there is no mentionable instance of a country having impressively raised its standard of living under dictatorship. It is not quite clear whether every, major case of democracy in our age has been a case of inefficiency and crippling dilatoriness—the available evidence seems to argue a somewhat different conclusion—but it is clear beyond doubt that every major case

of dictatorship has been attended with an inordinate diversion of resources to industries designed for some purpose other than raising the standard of consumption of the people. It will be dogmatic to dismiss this common characteristic of dictatorially managed economies as accidental.

The existence of a plurality of views on important issues is not an adventitious feature of modern society; it has its roots in the ineluctable complexity of our social structure. The introduction of one-party rule does not remove the social basis of diversity of ideas. This applies not only to "class-ridden" societies, but also to societies in which means of production have been nationalised. Ideas, though influenced, are not determined by economic interests; nor does conflict of economic interests between different sections of a community disappear with nationalisation or socialisation of means of production. One-party rule, whether in capitalist or socialist countries, means therefore, not the disappearance but the suppression of diversity of views. Alternatively, it may mean the suspension of the habit of thought by the people under the spell of a temporary intoxication or mass hysteria. Generally, it represents a blend of both these tendencies.

The rulers of a totalitarian State are quick to learn that the largest possible degree of obedience can be had from its citizens only when the latter, struck by some real or imaginary fear, are anxious to be protected by the strong arm of the State; and that one of the quickest ways of creating such panic amongst the people is to persuade them that the enemy is ever knocking at the door. The dictator, moreover, has to clothe himself with moral authority to suppress all his adversaries; and one of the easiest ways in which he can vest himself with such authority is to deceive himself and the people into the belief that the opposition acts under instructions from intriguing foreigners. Thus, it is not an accident that all the important totalitarian governments of our time have been marked by an extraordinary degree of militancy and a special talent for making enemies of neighbours. Not that non-totalitarian countries are incapable of

Aggression—war is obviously the product of a multiplicity of conditions but totalitarian countries are incapable of peace. Totalitarianism will as easily allow rival opinions to grow within the country as it will treat rival powers, reluctant to accept its leadership, as anything but wicked, furiously to be guarded against. One does not keep zealous guard against one's neighbours without paying a price for it. A large part of that price is non-material. But the cost of "defence", even in material terms, is high indeed. It measures what it takes away from the standard of material comforts of the citizens, and is never satisfied with its own performance till it has cut to the bone the supply of all the main goods of civilian consumption. The greater the resulting hardship thrown on the citizens, the greater becomes *the* need to blame it on the enemy.

Reflections on a parallel line suggest that just as a dictator is incapable of adopting a programme for prosperity, so also he is incapable of pursuing consistently an egalitarian programme. It is not given to dictatorship to serve as a dependable instrument either of prosperity or of equality. In an underdeveloped economy, dictatorship may bring quick development: but it will be development divorced from all that makes it truly desirable.

Dictatorship creates its own distinctive social milieu. To conceive of it as operating in an environment of which the remaining features conform to what the democratic tradition has taught us to value is to think in quite unrealistic terms. One cannot serve democratic ends with dictatorial means. One of our ablest economists has in a recent publication ventured the opinion: "Quick development, domestic financing, parliamentary democracy and income equality are all desirable ends. One can easily show that any three of these desirable ends can perhaps be secured together, but not all the four." The statement is strong in what it denies; but it is on less sure grounds in what, by implication, it asserts. Under parliamentary democracy, quick development cannot possibly be achieved on the basis of domestic financing and income equality.

It is, however, difficult to maintain that by abandoning democracy, and embracing totalitarianism, a country can, in any significant sense, secure the remaining trinity of ends. To argue that on the plane of purely economic logic there is nothing that debars a totalitarian system from attaining these ends, is to be less than fait to the case for parliamentary democracy. The incompatibility of parliamentary democracy with quick development, domestic financing and income equality cannot be proved with purely economic logic. The actual argument used in this case may profitably be reproduced here. "So long as periodically elected parliamentary government remains, no government will be courageous enough to impose huge current sacrifices on those whose votes have to be canvassed at intervals." If the case for parliamentary democracy is to be denied the benefit of a "purely" economic treatment—and there is certainly nothing wrong in such denial—it is hardly fair to allow this same benefit to the case for totalitarianism. Either one must conduct the whole<sup>1</sup> discussion in the rarefied atmosphere of pure economics, abstracting from

all political aspects of the problem, or one has to take into consideration extra-economic factors attaching to democracy as well as dictatorship. Whatever the plane of one's discussion, it is arguable that totalitarianism has the power to promote quick development; nothing that has been stated above goes to disprove this simple contention. Nor have we taken the trouble<sup>1</sup> of establishing formally that political regimentation and concentration of power is incompatible with any far-reaching plan for economic equality. But this second point is, possibly, not difficult to establish; and, regarding the first, one may only point out that behind all the talk about "quick development" then<sup>1</sup> is the suppressed premise<sup>1</sup> about such development being necessary for a rapid advance towards prosperity. It is this promise of prosperity which, one believes, totalitarianism is inherently incapable of fulfilling. To state the formal possibility of "quick development" being reached, without foreign aid, under a system of one-party dictatorship, and to allow this statement to go without qualification, is to risk misleading implications. One might

object to this criticism on the ground that totalitarianism is not the only alternative to parliamentary democracy. Abstractly considered, it is not the only alternative; within the universe of the present discourse, it is difficult to discover any other alternative. Whatever the details of the proposed alternative, it must, as the statement quoted above makes it amply clear, be free from the necessity of periodic contests between rival points of view for the allegiance of the people. This is the essence, of totalitarianism. The rest follows.

The statement criticised above comes from one of our most gifted economists. If one allows oneself the liberty to be critical about his choice of words, it is only out of an apprehension that so eminent an economist might have produced, through inadvertence, the semblance of support for a cause which, for all one knows, is furthest from his favour. The essential core of truth in the words criticised deserves recognition; but the form in which this truth has been presented seems to be incautious.



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