

A Calcutta Diary*The First and the Last*

A LITTLE over a hundred years ago Bengal — yes sir, no West Bengal then, in case the younger readers do not know — contributed the first Indian member to the Indian Civil Service, which hitherto had been anything but Indian. Last year, 1963 that is, two fairly senior Bengali members of the I C S decided to call it a day. (Incidentally, in the olden days at any rate, they were never retired; they were "permitted to resign".) Whatever the phrasing then and now, the two Bengali I C S men I am talking about felt they had had enough of the service as it works today and, with courage, they have told the Government of West Bengal so. Two names have already been announced; Ranjit Ray, an archer in spare time; and Sankar Maitra, until recently Indian Ambassador to the Philippines. There have been other eliminations through a variety of processes and for a variety of reasons; of them, later,

The departures have not exactly been matched by arrivals but they have, alas, been accompanied by another extraordinary development in what used to be known as "the heaven-born service". In the name of the emergency — the real reasons have, of course, nothing to do with the emergency, such as it is — two I C S men have been given extensions; what's more, the extensions have been accepted, by Ranjit Gupta, Chief Secretary, and Santosh Chatterji, Private Secretary to the Chief Minister. Their colleagues, and others, are no doubt churlish not to see in their decision yet another demonstration of their great patriotism.

Going Back

In the last 100 years can be seen not only the rise and fall of Bengal but also the development and erosion of the I C S. To all four processes has Bengal contributed more than its share, adding a fifth which can be dealt with only later. Bengal once had the biggest cadre in the service. Came 1947, with Prafulla Ghosh as Chief Minister, An honest man with limited vision and less experience of bureaucratic intrigue.

He reversed the British practice of separating the cattle from the sheep; judiciary and executive were to him one, with the scales somewhat weighted against the latter for their resistance to Congress nationalism was in the nature of things more direct. That was the I C S's first upheaval.

Prafulla Ghosh was soon replaced by Bidhan Roy, who came in with an aura of dynamism and the odd thesis that West Bengal was sadly "under-administered". He brought back from the Centre as many I C S men of the Bengal cadre as he could lay his hands on. You couldn't, those days, walk on the corridors of Writers' Building without bumping into I C S boys at the rate of three a second. The long-term implications of denuding New Delhi of the Bengal cadre never occurred to the man who knew "Jawahar" and nothing else was needed. His personality and his practice of operating through a durbar of favourites kept the boys back home reasonably happy and Bengal's voice was not altogether unheard in the capital, although even then there were demurrers who saw through dynamism. Annada Sankar Ray left and took to writing.

Going Out

Even before Dr Roy left the scene, something had been happening; the "steel-frame" of yore was showing links of thread, as frail as khadi. For one reason and another, S K Dey preferred a job with the F A O, as B R Sen had done before him. Nabagopal Das preferred something in the private sector to all the prestige and security of the I C S; U N Ghoshal is now in the World Bank, and V N Goswami in the UN Atomic Energy Commission. Arun Mukherjee left the service to be a starving barrister-at-law, at least initially, and is now a -High Court Judge. It is not for an outsider to know who was detracted from the service and who attracted by his new pasture. Not everyone may have been a great loss to West Bengal. The fact remains that so many, found useful and more by international bodies at many times the price West Bengal

was paying, are now working outside the State, which is no longer known for an access of administrative talent. It is for Prafulla Sen and other interfering Ministers and politicians to answer why so many are preferring to work with other people, elsewhere.

B C Roy is gone, with his "hot line" to the Prime Minister. And now there is talk of calling back some of the remaining Bengal cadre boys. Even a few years ago every time a malcontent Bengali came to me to complain that such and such Bengali Minister or official refused to him, for fear of being called "provincial", I immediately used to say, "Three cheers for them !" I remain of the same view, minus the earlier stubbornness. If Bombay is financially ahead of Calcutta, Morarji Desai and his friends may have contributed to it; if much investment, has gone to the South (*pace* I M K) the credit may have to be distributed equally between Kamaraj and the southern preponderance in the New Delhi bureaucracy. If Punjab has done well industrially, the steady Punjabiisation of the capital may have had something to do with it. Nor is Bengal's right to complain unlimited. The Bengali preponderance in the secretariat and the executive council once favoured Bengal in some ways. Only Statism was never so brazen and vulgar as today.

Going On

The erosion of the I C S and that of Bengal has run parallel in time and sequence; students of history have here a quarry to explore or whatever it is they do with quarries. This reporter is concerned only with the fact that the double decline has already gone too far for anyone to do anything about it. It has to be added that the phenomenon may have done great harm to Bengal without doing much good to India. It has to be added further that Bengal's decline may have been the cause of the decline of the I C S and *vice versa*. There was a qualitative failure all round.

Now to the fifth factor. Even as Bengal once made the I C S what it was, in its last days its Bengali

remnants can reflect with pride that, when it became clear that the present rulers of India were determined not to let the I C S work according to its traditions — with authority, dignity and absolute integrity which means not even conniving at cor-

rupt or otherwise unworthy practices — protest and dissociation have been the widest in Bengal. No other cadre, I think, has seen so many resignations, not to secure more lucrative terms elsewhere but—Bengal is old-fashioned — to save their souls.

It may be a good thing if more refuse cooperation with evil. After all, they get full pension. Let the I A S inherit the earth. Or, should one have said hell?

—*Flibbertigibbet*

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