

SATYA BANNERJI

**AN INDIAN
WORKER
LOOKS AT
EUROPEAN
INDUSTRY**

SATYA BANNERJI lives and works in Calcutta. He is the Secretary of the Light Railways' Staff Association of West Bengal. He is also President of the Hindustan Drivers' Union in West Bengal. Mr Bannerji has been two months in Europe, half of that time in Britain, and attended the special Transport Session of the World Assembly for Moral Re-Armament at Caux, Switzerland.

MRA PAMPHLET SERVICE

This pamphlet is one of a series on topical themes, by authors of wide experience in their fields. To receive future pamphlets subscribe to the MRA Pamphlet Service. Send £1 (airmail £2) with your name and address to:

MRA, 4 Hays Mews, London W1X 7RS
Subscribers will receive each new pamphlet as it is published plus the bonus of two free pamphlets when their subscription expires.

PRICE 1S

6 FOR 5S, 20 FOR 16S, POSTAGE EXTRA

SBN 901110 06 X

PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 1969 BY MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

~~4 HAYS MEWS, BERKELEY SQUARE, LONDON W1X 7RS~~

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY WARD & WOOLVERTON LTD, MITCHAM

MRA BOOKS

54 LYFORD ROAD

LONDON, SW18 3JJ

DEV 160

I COME FROM CALCUTTA, where we have five million people of whom one million have no shelter over their heads. Thousands are born, exist and die on the pavements. In our present political climate, rioting mobs burn, loot and destroy the railway stations, factory premises and office buildings. Democratic trade unionists are under constant attack by extreme leftist parties linked with the State Government, which by policy gives us no police protection. There have been over two hundred political murders, many of whom were trade union workers who believed in democratic trade unionism.

Coming to Britain, I marvel at the achievements of the Labour movement, both in the trade unions and in the Government. I am impressed, not only by the standards of living, but by the status achieved by Labour men. As a worker myself, I feel a sense of pride about these achievements.

However, I must speak out and say that amid this economic advance I also see certain dangerous trends which could be corrected if the Labour militants took their social revolution a stage further. For, just as man has two legs on which he walks, so I believe, we must balance the economic and social advance with the other leg of moral development and character in man.

For many years we have been rightly concerned with feeding the stomachs, but now we Socialists need to concern ourselves as passionately with the feeding of hungry hearts and minds.

I have been astonished to find when meeting many trade unionists and Socialists in Europe, that they still talk and think and live in terms of the outmoded theory of the class struggle. They cling to outdated dogma, despite the high standard of living that they have attained when compared with that of India. It seems to me to be childish and immature to think in terms of the class war in an atomic age. For the explosive forces of hate, which class war magnifies and uses, could, unsolved, lead to total world destruction.

Our European brothers should keep in mind what certain of the Communist Chinese leaders have said: "The next phase of the class struggle will not be between have and have not classes within a country, but between have and have not nations."

It is clear to me that class war is a game of brinkmanship. Just as some industrial methods have been outdated for over a century, is it not time that we modernized our attitudes? For class war not only divides nations, but also our society, factories and even our homes.

If catastrophe comes from this class war brinkmanship and war follows between Russia and America, or between Russia and China, then your country and mine will both suffer.

It is hollow-sounding to talk with envy and hatred and fight class war, when the trade unionists who speak in these terms have a standard of living which we Indians would regard as being capitalist. In many homes I have visited, I have seen the wall-to-wall carpets, the television and in some cases even two cars parked in front of the house.

I am pleased and proud that our British brothers have made these advances. But at this point of time in history, when the gap between the rich and poor nations is widening, not lessening, we may need to have a wider definition of the word "brotherhood". Some of the energy which is still going into fighting for a larger slice of the cake in the European countries, could, if diverted towards the less fortunate countries, be a tremendous boost in lifting our lot to even a minimum standard.

We need now a new definition of brotherhood, within nations as well as between nations. In Londonderry, for example, I met dockers who are still on "casual" labour, who told me that they have suffered because of unofficial strikes in the ports of Preston and Heysham in England. Though I sympathize with the undoubted grievances of the dockers in Preston and Heysham, can it really be brotherhood when our fight makes other brothers suffer without their consent?

I would like also to enlist the help of the European trade union movement in the job of taking the Communist world to the next stage of revolution. They too need to concern them-

selves with the whole man and not just the economic man. It has been said that Communism is due to the neglected conscience of the West. It may also be true that the neglected conscience of the Communist world will lead to anarchy and nihilism in their society, and in turn throughout the world, with power struggles and disintegration.

In the same way, Western societies which lack a bigger purpose than bettering only themselves are leading to anarchy, nihilism and rebellion, especially among the young.

One trade unionist in England said that he could not negotiate on the basis of absolute honesty. His negotiations were conditioned by the mathematics of how much money there was in the industry and how much of it the workers could get. I told him that the mathematics of a true Socialist should include what is best for the entire industry and for the consumers of our products, both at home and in other countries.

I see that there is no end to the game of comparing my lot with that of the man who is better off. As Mr George Brown said at the Labour Party Conference last year, "The battle for a pound a week more is a battle we can never win". Unless these claims are in a bigger context than what we want, they result in divisions within the Labour movement, between the skilled, the semi-skilled and the non-skilled workers, and between manual workers and white-collar workers. Each group fiercely maintains its right to be better off than the others or to catch up, and this causes conflict.

The marvellous technological advances I see should be matched by broadened and heightened conceptions for labour. I remember the Prime Minister of Britain, Mr Wilson, in 1964 talking of harnessing the "white-hot heat of technological revolution", but today there is far too much heat caused by the friction resulting from factional fights in the ranks of labour, by wild-cat strikes and by sectional thinking.

During my visit to Europe I had some very encouraging encounters with men in industry, which showed me how men of labour can take the initiative. One was in Limburg in Holland where I visited the headquarters of the Christian Mineworkers' Union. The union officials told me that more

than ten years ago they foresaw that there would be redundancy in the Dutch coalmines, due to uneconomic workings and due to the Common Market mergers which were envisaged. Rather than waiting for this redundancy to happen, the union leaders approached the Dutch Government and offered to co-operate with them in closing down uneconomic pits on condition that alternative employment was developed side by side with pit closures. This has worked and in effect, as a pit has closed, a factory has opened. I learnt that a number of the senior officials of this union have taken part in the Moral Re-Armament conferences.

In Northern Ireland also, where I met trade unionists from the shipyards, docks, aircraft factory, transport and Trade Union Congress heads, I found a common concern by these men for the tragic divisions in the whole country and not only a concern for their own particular section of industry. The effect of this sense of responsibility has been that in all these major enterprises, the communal disturbances between Catholics and Protestants have been kept out of the factories and off the quaysides.

The lead was given by the shop stewards of the huge Harland and Wolff shipyards, where 9,000 men are employed. It was in this yard 30 years ago that similar troubles began. This time both Catholic and Protestant shop stewards approached the management and then convened a mass meeting, attended by 5-6,000 workers. It was unanimously decided to keep the shipyard running normally and to keep the religious disputes outside the gates. A cabinet minister was invited to speak at the meeting and a well-known clergyman closed the meeting with a prayer, at the workers' invitation.

Here were men who thought in national terms, not parochial ones. I learnt that if the troubles in the streets had reached the factories, then civil war might well have erupted. In the home of one of the shop stewards I learnt that a number of the men who took a good deal of the initiative in this matter were, like myself, men who had experience in Moral Re-Armament which had contributed to their giving responsible leadership.

I met employers, too, who are as concerned about t

condition of my people as I am. For example, Swiss Construction Company Director, not only builds ~~NULL~~ for 20% less than anyone else. He has also come to India to help us re-shape our society.

Originally, the trade unions were a defensive movement, developed in response to capitalist excesses. Now that labour has made so many advances and has acquired such powers in society, we ought to go on the offensive. The trade unions should be a spur to management and government to see that industry meets the needs of millions all over the world. A wholly new teamwork would follow if we challenged the management to join us in the bigger fight, that of putting the welfare of mankind before pay and profit. The Welfare State needs to be extended to becoming the state of welfare of the world as a whole. Further, in a welfare state no system of social security or of social welfare can meet man's deepest longing for security and care if it is not run by men having an answer to selfishness and bitterness in their own hearts.

Despite our dislike for the trappings and injustices of the old Imperialism, thousands of us Indians have looked to Britain to find the glories of a new civilisation. I must say that coming to Britain this time I have been taken aback on feeling the impact of your "permissive society". Perhaps there is a link between the idea that you can do anything you like morally and the growing practice of workers downing tools in factories, mines and docks, in the expectation that by walking off the job and abdicating responsibility they will get what they want. Is it likely that the irresponsibility of immorality which conditions a man in his private life, will drop away from him as he steps inside his factory gates?

Yet, as I understand it, the Labour Government, while not necessarily advocating permissive legislation officially, has stood to one side and allowed it to become law. The Government then cannot blame anyone but themselves at the lack of discipline in industry. It is not enough to be neutral in moral matters. We need to pursue as vigorously the lifting of the moral level, as we have the lifting of living standards.

We workers have been reared in the conception that the old

aristocracy and the privileged section of society are greedy and selfish. Yet workers who, though they call themselves militant, blackmail their other colleagues in the industry and also blackmail the industry itself, for wage gains for their particular group and sectional interest, are surely behaving just as selfishly and greedily.

The British Labour Party is entering the pre-election period with new slogans which I read, such as "Labour has soul". But what kills the soul is greed, selfishness and immoral living. Big-hearted Britishers could restore the soul of this country and of Europe, by concerning themselves with all those across the world who are worse off. The British workers could humanize an industry which has become mechanized and computerized, and show the way for a new industrial revolution.

It may be unfashionable to utter warnings about some of the trends I see in Europe, but I do think that an affluent society which has no purpose is in fact a deadly danger. We see in Germany how the old militarism has been replaced to a certain extent by economic dominance and though this has provided prosperous living for the German people, this materialism is no answer to Russian or American materialism. In fact, this common pursuit of materialism by management and labour in Germany is causing divisions in their own industries now that the economy has reached a certain static plane. This somewhat artificial sense of economic security which the German people have is no answer to their constant fear of national insecurity.

While in France recently I saw that, although the workers made considerable gains after the disturbances last year, certain unions are using industrial disputes for political ends with the avowed aim of toppling the Government. One danger I see is that insistent provocation and encouragement of economic anarchy from the Left might result in a reaction from the Right, just as in pre-war Germany and Japan Fascism grew as a reaction to Leftist extremists.

In America too it is clear that material progress unaccompanied by moral development brings chaos in its wake. In what is per capita the most prosperous country on earth, the Ameri-

cans say they live on a powder keg of racial hate; and in some cities it is unsafe to walk alone on the pavements late at night.

In Britain it is not enough for the Government to plead for the workers to help them improve the balance of payments, there needs to be an appeal to the heart and conscience. I have noticed a strong common-sense in the ranks of British labour; their capacity to apply their mind thoroughly to a job when they want to do a job properly, their strong sense of humour and warmth of heart.

I find a warmth of heart in Britain which moves me very much. It is enough to use the very word that I am from India and people open their doors and hearts. It is a pity that our Indian Government does not take into adequate account this fund of goodwill and take advantage of it for our mutual progress.

I have worked in a Railway for the last 23 years. This is the only remaining privately owned railway in India. It is losing money. The Government do not want to take it over, for this same reason.

Not long ago, during the political swing to the extreme Left in my State, the men I represent voted an "outsider", having no connection with the industry, to become the General Secretary of my Union, instead of myself. This hurt me very much, because I have always been the Union head, doing the best for my men.

In a spirit of bitterness I did everything I could to undercut this man's position and because I worked in the office I was able to frustrate his attempts to deal with workers' complaints. The explosive situation created by unsolved grievances threatened to erupt in a spontaneous strike. At this point, I had the compelling thought. "What is more important? Your pride and position? Or the welfare of the 2,000 men whose livelihood depends on this industry?" For I knew that if there had been a strike, then this railway would have lost its traffic to the roads and it never would have come back, and the industry would have closed down. So I went to my opponent and said I was sorry for the difficulties I had caused him. I said, "You have a right to your political opinions. I have a right to mine. But I

have no right to undermine your position and I want to work with you for the good of the industry."

At first he did not trust me and indeed there was no reason why he should do so. So for six months I laboured to undo the wrong I had done. The time came when we got together, sat down with the management and an agreement was signed for three years, thus stabilizing the industry for that period. The management put right certain grievances and gave us some increases in salary.

This agreement made news, because in Calcutta never a day goes past without some industries having strikes, lockouts and in many cases closing down altogether.

Just shortly after our agreement was signed, I was working in our head office when news reached us that a rioting mob of 500, led by extreme Left-wing students, had attacked our main station. They had smashed windows, ransacked the building and were tampering with signalling equipment.

Again I had a forceful thought: "Go and meet the situation". Humanly my knees were trembling, but I had the compelling thought to go on the spot, though I knew that the police would not protect us, because in our State the Government's policy is that the police should not interfere with student activities, because students support them. When the Traffic Superintendent and myself reached the station, we were immediately surrounded by this howling mob.

They gave us stools to stand on and for six long hours we endured their insults and slogans without respite. When we got a hearing we told them how this industry was running at a loss and that its sole purpose was to serve the 30,000 people whom we carry to and from work daily. The flimsy reason of the attack was the late running of a few trains, but they added a whole list of impossible demands.

We said that as we had no police protection, then our fate was in their hands. We also said that the running of the industry itself was up to them. They could break it or they could enable us to continue providing this service.

After six hours, a section of the crowd sided with us and then chased the extremist students away and together we lifted the

barricades which had been put across the railway tracks. Normal service was resumed.

I learned that as I am responsible for labour, so I am responsible for my industry and nation. I also learned that in a crisis God plus one equals the majority.

In my own life I have learnt that in terms of attitude and motive the poor can be as selfish as the rich. We workers can behave as greedily towards those who have even less than us, as many capitalists behave towards the workers. We must aim to answer the spiritual poverty, as well as the material poverty. This is why Moral Re-Armament is a total revolution and needs to be the basis of Labour's next great forward leap.

In all of these endeavours we must create new leaders and must ourselves become leaders with new motives. For too long now, leaders have told us, "Give me the power and I will lead you to the Promised Land." But we need leaders who will place the responsibility squarely where it belongs, on the head of the ordinary man. The leaders must demonstrate in their own lives the quality of unselfishness they want to see in the new society they are out to create.

This requires of us to live by the absolute moral standards of Moral Re-Armament – absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love – and to learn to obey what Mahatma Gandhi used to call "the inner voice". This means cutting out moral compromise in our own lives. We will have a clear aim. We will have more inner fire than the fire which comes from a cigarette end or from a whisky bottle.

As I have moved about Europe, shared my experiences and learned from workers and management who have likewise applied Moral Re-Armament, I have formed the strong conviction that just as a problem anywhere is a threat to security everywhere, so an answer anywhere is applicable everywhere.

In this way, Europeans and Asians can share a common aim. So can workers and bosses. Such an aim, if it is global and if it embraces the moral and material needs of all men everywhere, will be larger than our present divisions. In this context lies the hope of progress for world labour.