

RESCUE, NOT INVASION

MINOO MASANI

ON OCTOBER 19, the Prime Minister of India and several Cabinet Ministers were assassinated in New Delhi by a group of "Marxist-Leninist" terrorists armed by Communists from Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. They made a coup on the ground that the Government of India was not "Leftist" enough and seized power by force. The President of the Republic was imprisoned in Rashtrapati Bhavan and prevented from making outside contact.

On October 21, the governments of neighbouring countries met in Singapore to consider what could be done. Among those represented were Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Burma, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan. While they were in session, they received a message smuggled out from the President of India asking for help, including military intervention.

On October 25, in response to the President's request, friendly forces entered India to liberate it from the gang of thugs in possession of Delhi.

On October 27, resistance was overcome. A large number of Afghan prisoners were taken and large caches of Soviet arms were discovered.

On October 28, the President of India joined the people of Delhi in welcoming foreign troops and announced his intention of holding free elections within six months and establishing an interim government meanwhile.

On November 3, the foreign forces began their withdrawal from India, their mission accomplished.

As it happens, thank God, this did **not** happen in

India, but this is **precisely** what happened in the distant island of Grenada in the Caribbean, not to be confused with the better known city of Grenada in Spain.

* * * * *

On October 19 1983, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, himself a "Marxist", was murdered in cold blood along with some of his Ministers by "Marxists-Leninists" within his own party who did not consider him revolutionary enough. They made a coup and terrorised the people of Grenada. The Governor-General, Sir Paul Scoon, a nominee of the British Queen, himself a coloured Grenadian, was imprisoned in Government House and not allowed to contact the Queen.

On October 21 and 22, when the heads of the neighbouring Caribbean states were in an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States to discuss measures to deal with the situation, they received a telephone message from the Governor-General of Grenada requesting military assistance to restore order. Sir Paul Scoon's letter, later published in *The Daily Telegraph* of October 28, read as follows:

"Dear Prime Minister, You are aware that there is a vacuum of authority in Grenada following the killing of the Prime Minister and the subsequent serious violations of human rights and bloodshed. I am therefore seriously concerned over the lack of internal security in Grenada.

"Consequently I am requesting your help to assist me in stabilising this grave and dangerous situation.

It is my desire that a peace-keeping force should be established in Grenada to facilitate a rapid return to peace and tranquility and also a return to democratic rule.

"In this connection I am also seeking assistance from the United States, from Jamaica and from the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States through its current chairperson, the Hon. Eugenia Charles, through the Treaty establishing that organisation to which my country is a signatory".

In an interview with the BBC, the Prime Minister of Dominica, Miss Eugenia Charles, explained that the initiative for the military intervention came from the Caribbean countries, and not from the U.S., after they became seriously concerned with the Cuban-Soviet arms build-up in Grenada.

On October 25, in response to the Governor-General's request, troops from six Caribbean countries, namely, Barbados, Jamaica, Dominica, Antigua, St. Vincent and St. Louis, and the U.S.A. landed in Grenada. The main resistance came from Cuban forces. This was overcome within three days.

The people of Grenada welcomed the foreign troops with open arms. Mr. W. Ellsworth Jones reports from Grenada in *The Times* on October 30 that "the people were actually welcoming the invaders. The welcome for them in Grenada is genuine. The U.S. army is enjoying a honeymoon here." British correspondents have quoted several citizens of

Grenada. Mr. B. John, a building contractor, told *The Times* correspondent: "The island has been like a prison for five years. Now we have a chance to get out of the mess." *The Observer* correspondent reports a Grenadian mother as saying: "Thank Gawd! Thank Gawd! Gawd bless America."

The foreign forces discovered, according to *The Herald Tribune*, "a complete base with weapons and communication equipment which makes it clear that Cuban occupation of the island had been planned". *The Sunday Times* correspondent refers to the "impressive array" of Soviet and Cuban arms stored in Grenada and quotes an American Colonel as saying: "If we blew up all the arms on the island, we would sink the place!"

On October 29, the Governor-General, by then liberated from the Marxist-Leninist thugs, welcomed the arrival of the foreign troops and said they had come "just in time" to save the situation. Interviewed by the BBC in *Panorama*, Sir Paul Scoon welcomed the Caribbean and U.S. action and said: "I would like them to remain here for as long as is necessary." The Governor-General also announced that he would require from six to twelve months to organise free elections and that he would set up an interim government of technocrats within a few days to carry on till then.

Finally, on November 3, the President of the U.S.A. announced that the foreign troops, their mission accomplished, were now beginning their withdrawal

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from the Island. So all's well, you will say, that ends well.

* * * * *

But did the rest of the world see it that way? Alas, no! There was, in many countries, a wave of hysteria, based on ignorance. The U.N. General Assembly, packed with Third World dictatorships which do not allow free elections in their own countries, passed one of its usual vapid resolutions deploring those developments and calling for early elections.

The Caribbean countries and the U.S.A. were accused in many quarters of violating international law. As one who obtained his LL.B. degree from London University in International Law, I say "Balderdash!"

There is an ancient legal maxim that is relevant, "*Inter armes leges silent*" (amidst a clash of arms, the laws are silent). Is it seriously suggested that, if a few armed thugs kill a country's Prime Minister and imprison the Head of State, the rest of the world should supinely sit and watch? Does a bandit like Bacha-E-Saqo become "Afghanistan" by driving King Amanullah from Kabul for a few days? Was Uganda not invaded in spite of President Idi Amin being in power?

Grenada was not invaded. The people of Grenada were liberated from a gang of terrorists and assassins who were bolstered by Cuban forces and Soviet arms. *The Daily Telegraph* of October 29, in the course of an excellent editorial, observes: "Recognition is needed among America's transatlantic allies that defence against Soviet expansionism is indivisible; that Britain's frontier and Germany's are as much on the Rio Negro as they are on the Elbe; that a Cuban foothold in Grenada threatens our security. We cannot afford the luxury of neutrality in the Cuban-American conflict, because an unfavourable outcome would outflank Europe and divert American resources from European defence. One cannot in all logic be neutral in the Caribbean Basin and committed to European defence."

The Caribbean-U.S. action was not only legitimate, but a courageous act for which lovers of freedom throughout the world should be thankful.

But what then about "world opinion"? Many years ago Mr. James Burnham, an acute political thinker, described "world opinion" as a synthetic product and a "Bitch Goddess" who should be ignored. Mrs. Thatcher in the Falklands and President Reagan in

Grenada quite rightly ignored world opinion and both won their fight.

An effort has been made in this country to play up the difference of opinion between the U.K. and the U.S.A. It is natural that, just as the U.S.A. did not find it possible to "approve" of the British re-occupation of the Falklands, British chose not to "approve" of the U.S.-Caribbean action in Grenada. So what? Since when have the U.S.A. and the U.K. surrendered their right to act unless they get the other's approval first?

The British Government, which had at first some doubts about the subject, saw light at last on October 27. According to *The Guardian* of October 28, "The British Government now concedes that the Governor-General of Grenada, Sir Paul Scoon, had the constitutional authority to call in outside troops and to form an interim administration as the first step towards restoring normal parliamentary rule. British ministers now reluctantly concede that Sir Paul was within his rights in calling on foreign forces to intervene in Grenada. The collective verdict of a number of constitutional lawyers in London yesterday was that the Governor-General is entitled to act under his Reserve Powers when law and order is breaking down and that he has a duty to do so."

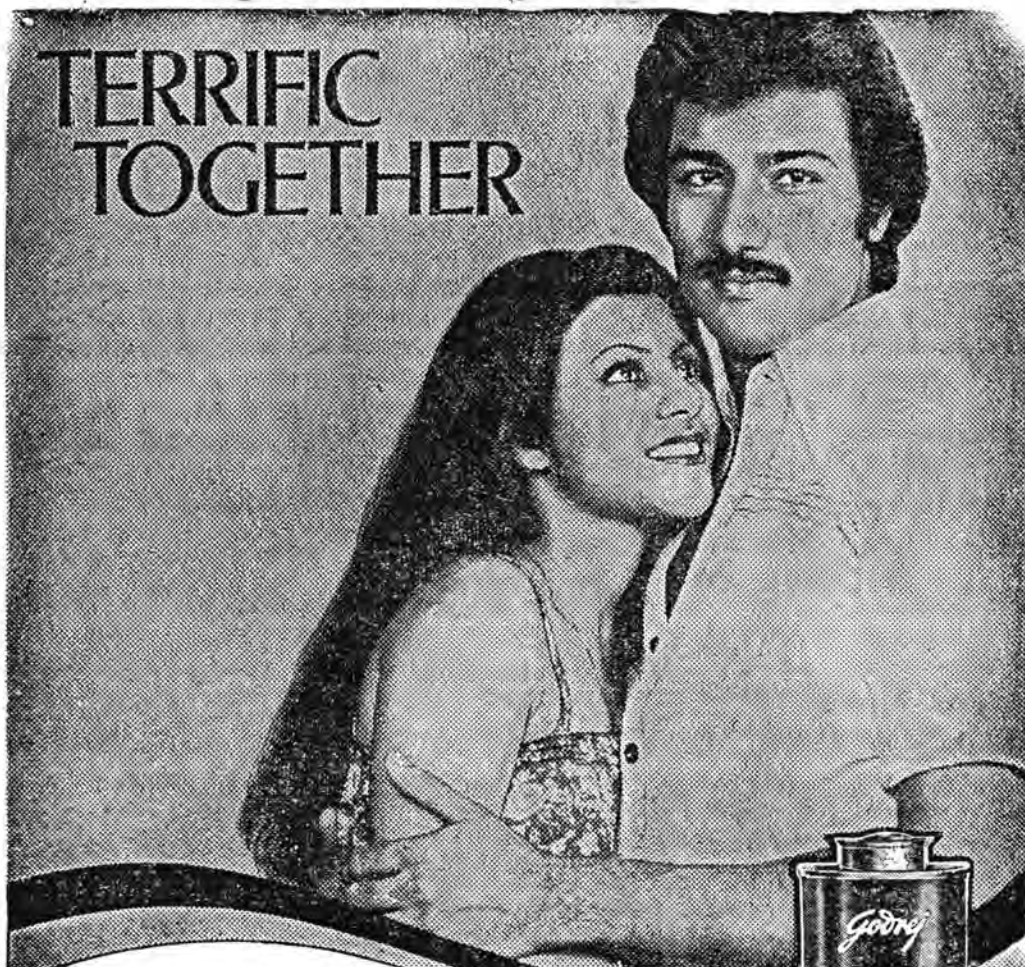
The best reply to the busybodies has been given by none other than Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the House of Commons: "We stand by the U.S. and will continue to do so. We are very grateful to the U.S. which is in fact looking after British citizens and evacuating them from Grenada. . . . The U.S.", she continued amidst cheers, "is the final guarantor of freedom in Europe."

And what about the Government of India? As usual, it disgraced itself. It voted of course for the U.N. General Assembly resolution deploring the military action but, when Belgium moved an amendment, which was accepted, asking for early elections, why did the Indian representative abstain from voting for free elections?

Incidentally, the Chairperson of the NAM was to have received the late lamented Prime Minister Maurice Bishop as her guest at the Commonwealth Conference in Delhi this month. Is it not peculiar that she has not shed a tear or expressed a word of anguish over the assassination of a fellow non-aligned Prime Minister?

(Courtesy: *The Statesman*)

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RULE BY ORDINANCE

K. S. VENKATESWARAN

IT IS doubtful whether any of the provisions of the Indian Constitution have been abused more frequently or with greater impunity than those relating to the issue of Ordinances by the executive. Devised with the laudable objective of helping to tide over unexpected emergencies during the inter-session periods of the legislature, these provisions have, over the years, been converted into instruments of political skullduggery by governments both at the Centre and in the States.

The most recent example of such flagrant abuse of the Ordinance-making power is, of course, the "take-over" of 13 Bombay-based textile mills by the Union Government in a surreptitious midnight operation on 19 October, on grounds that are patently far from tenable. Even those whose sympathies are not exactly with the mill-owners have been hard put to it to deny that the government's action, reeking as it does with *mala fides*, transcends considerations of injustice to the few individuals directly affected by the "take-over".

Perhaps the saddest part of the story is the increasing insensitivity with which successive exercises of this kind have been accepted by the Indian public, or at least that segment of it which can lay claim to being 'educated' and therefore better equipped to analyse issues of such seminal importance on merits. The painful truth is that, except for a few intrepid voices of dissent, the predominant reaction to instances of constitutional impropriety in India has always been one of easy nonchalance, if not ready acquiescence.

A timely warning of the extent to which this tendency has grown is provided by a recent study published under the auspices of a Poona-based research institute (*Re-promulgation of Ordinances; A Fraud on the Constitution of India*, by D. C. Wadhwa, Orient Longmans). The product of an accidental incursion into the constitutional field by the author while researching agrarian legislation in Bihar, the study exposes in disturbing detail the shocking insolence which the government of that notorious State has persistently displayed towards even the elementary norms of constitutional behaviour.

Between 1971 and 1982 alone, for instance, as many as 1,958 Ordinances were promulgated by the

Governor of Bihar as against 163 enactments passed by the State legislature during the period. Demonstrably, many of these Ordinances were mere replicas of earlier ones which were deliberately allowed to lapse, lest they should have to suffer the scrutiny of the legislature. Some of the Ordinances have succeeded in laying down the law of the land for as long as 13 years without ever being transformed into legislative enactments. A measure of the fecundity of the Bihar Governor's office can be had from the fact that no less than 56 Ordinances were promulgated on a single day—18 January 1976—which must surely rank as a record among democratic polities the world over!

The *modus operandi* of the government in perpetuating its rule by Ordinance is all too familiar. Since the life of an Ordinance is restricted under the Constitution to six weeks after the re-convening of the legislature session, the government takes adequate care to prorogue the legislature well before the completion of six weeks of its session. Immediately thereafter, but just before an Ordinance is due to lapse, the Governor promulgates another exactly identical Ordinance, repealing its predecessor. This new Ordinance is brought into force immediately. Even where the sanction of the President of India is required, it is obtained with an expedition that is truly amazing. The process is repeated scrupulously at periodic intervals, often for a decade or more.

In the face of such brazenly irresponsible behaviour of our wily politicians, the question that every thinking citizen would be tempted to ask, quite obviously, is: "Isn't there a remedy available under the law to prevent the Constitution from being reduced to a mockery in this dishonest fashion?" Unfortunately, the attitude of our judiciary on this question has been far from encouraging. As far back as 1970, the Supreme Court of India consciously missed an opportunity of deciding the justiciability of the existence of circumstances necessary for the promulgation of an Ordinance by the President of India, in the *Bank Nationalisation Case*. Despite observing that "the exercise of the power is strictly conditioned," the Court refused to make any definitive pronouncement, on the technical grounds that in the case before it

the question did not survive because the Ordinance, had since been replaced by an Act of Parliament.

A similar reason was proffered when the issue was raised before the Court in the *National Security Ordinance Case* in 1981. There, too, by the time the matter came up for hearing, the National Security Act had replaced the Ordinance and the Court expressed its helplessness to interfere, adding that "abstract questions present interesting challenges, but it is for scholars and textbook writers to unravel their mystique. It is not for the courts to decide questions which are but of academic importance."

Discouraging as these words are, they do not nevertheless spell the end of all hope. For, as Dr. Wadhwa points out, it is still possible for the judiciary to reconsider its stand in the light of the Bihar experience where several Ordinances even today continue to hold the field without seeking reincarnation as Acts of the legislature. Hopefully, some day some public-spirited citizen will succeed in persuading the Supreme Court to act decisively in arresting this pernicious tendency on the part of our elected representatives and to lay down strict guidelines for the exercise of the Ordinance-making power by the executive. The sooner this comes about, the better.

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LATIN AMERICA AND THE SOVIET STRATEGY

MANFRED SCHONFELD

THE FOCUS of world public attention has now been concentrated on Central America and on the Caribbean rather than on South America. One of the reasons for this is that there are large oil resources, which are easy to exploit in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbeans.

The Soviet interest in Central America is not because the Soviets need oil for themselves but because they want to control it as an economic and political weapon with which to exert pressure and coerce the industrialised Western countries. Thus they have been trying very hard to gain influence in two of the most important oil basins of the world—in the Middle East and in Central America.

It has not been easy for them to gain influence there, but their strategy is to destabilise countries in those regions.

This strategy has an even farther reach and is not limited by such immediate matters as hydrocarbon supplies for the next twenty or thirty years. That is why, unlike the Western powers, which only aim at the Caribbean or the Middle East, the Kremlin also works in South American areas, where oil is one of the potential resources. The Soviets work in Colombia and Peru; they also work in Bolivia and were about to establish a beachhead in Chile, which has no oil but is of invaluable strategic importance. Besides, they are active in Brazil and Argentina, two countries where it is not easy to work. The Soviets work unceasingly, heavily and slowly; they often work clumsily and without tact. But they work without expecting immediate benefits.

At present Soviet communist penetration is particularly possible in three places: Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. It is less possible in Venezuela and Ecuador.

Colombia is one of the most chronically corrupt countries in all of Latin America. In this country there is an additional factor which weighs in the systematic process of corruption, viz., drug-trafficking which mainly consists of producing for the illegal markets—the largest being the U.S.

Bolivia also faces a similar problem. Before the "marijuana boom" the situation in Bolivia was not ideal. There was, for instance, "an era of violence" but there was at least a certain degree of stability and normal succession of constitutional governments on

the basis of agreement or consensus between the two main political forces—the conservatives and the liberals. Moreover, Bolivia benefitted from a "coffee boom" and there was some diversification of its economy. But then came the drug-traffic problem which adversely affected the economic and political life of the country.

The leftist elements, bent on subversion along with their Soviet supporters, have an easy target for criticism. They take a moralist attitude and ask for a "clean up" of every corrupt element in the country.

The present governments of Columbia and Bolivia are doing everything possible to fight the problem, but they face powerful and entrenched groups.

Peru, on the other hand, still suffers from the problems left by the leftist military government. While moving closer to the Soviet Union, it led the country to economic ruin, with the result that the Government now in power finds itself in a difficult situation. The country is now infested with small movements of more or less extreme leftist orientation many of them armed. Peru has become an ideal ground for the Soviets to operate.

The general picture of Central America as it appears to the outside world is that a small oligarchy of very rich people live off a great mass of very poor people in this region. This is true only in some cases. It is not necessarily that way always. For instance, El Salvador is the only Central American country (besides Costa Rica) that has, in addition to its impoverished farmers of native Indian origin, an industrious middle class and an urban proletariat. It is precisely this that attracts the Marxists. The Salvadoreans have shown, by defying the threats and intimidation of communist guerrillas, their choice by registering their votes in an overwhelming manner in the last election. But the U.S. government is demonstrating that it lacks a clearly-defined policy by refusing to give arms to the Salvadoreans, who are defending their small country against an open attempt at total destabilisation, directed and supported from outside.

The struggle against the Sandinista communist rulers of Nicaragua has started. The anti-Sandinista guerrillas are the armed factions of a pluralist political movement going from the right to the left. There might be some members of the National Guard of

the former dictator Somoza in it, but there are also elements in it who had fought the Somoza regime.

Among the important "ABC" countries in Latin America—Argentina, Brazil and Chile—the Soviets were successful in Chile, but later the military regime took over. In recent years internal difficulties have begun to surface there—above all economic ones—from Pinochet's autocracy. The left is in a state of alertness, and when they are ready they will charge again. A dictatorship is, at times, more easily overthrown than a democracy.

The Soviet strategy in Latin America is flexible. Where there are intense problems, they support subversive activities to overthrow dictatorships; where there is a possibility of getting to power by democratic means, they support legitimate activities. They even support the activities of those leftists who may not fully toe the Moscow line.

The strategy is good, but it is not capable of catching the irrational element peculiar to each Latin American country. The fact of European incapability to catch the national soul of continents foreign to the European sphere is what can save Latin America from Soviet penetration.

(Courtesy: Antar-Sanchar)

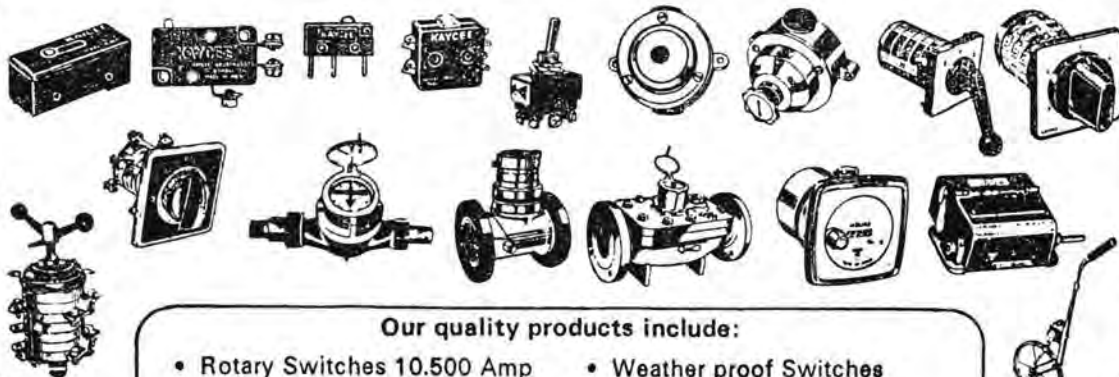
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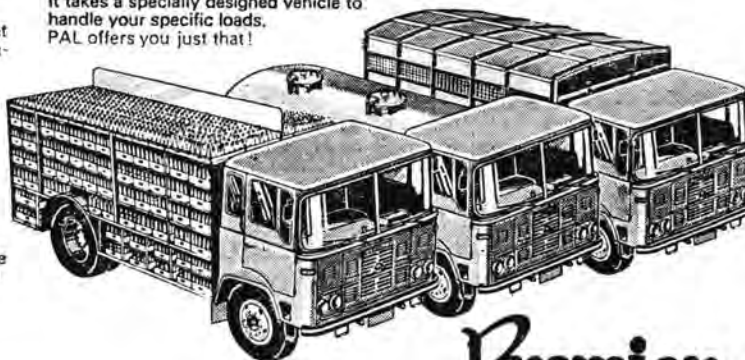
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THE SHUNNED AND THE SHUNTED?

by M. B. SHAH

THE PEOPLE'S Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) is essentially an elitist organisation established for the purpose of upholding the rule of law in our country. However, to fuel its supine existence into a mass-euphoria, the PUCL has of late decided to mobilise mass support. So it has adopted a populist stance.

The hutment-dwellers' Writ Petitions, first in the Bombay High Court and later in the Supreme Court (SC), can be categorised as a symbol of the PUCL's craze for such populism. In the process, it has run roughshod over the rule of law, the very essence of its existence.

Predictably, there has been an uproar and indignation against the PUCL's misconceived course which is led, among others, by the eminent jurist Nani Palkhivala. This resulted in the resignation from the PUCL of the prominent scholar and writer, Durgabai Bhagwat, who, along with others, have openly supported the government and the Bombay Municipal Corporation. The result is a slump in the PUCL's popularity. In order to possibly recover its lost image the PUCL has recently published a pamphlet, *The Shunned and the Shunted: The Slum and Pavement Dwellers of Bombay*.

Any impartial and enlightened person can see that the PUCL has failed to build up a convincing case in its favour and its arguments supportive of its stand are sterile. What it lacks in legal and cogent arguments, it tries to make up by using highly pejorative and emotive phrases comparing the removal of the hutment dwellers with the deportation of the Jews in Nazi Germany, Blacks in South Africa, etc.

The Preface appearing under the names of two leading activists of the PUCL, Darshana Bhogilal and Navroz H. Seervai, itself exposes the untenability of the PUCL's case. It states that the PUCL has been actively associated in protecting the civil liberties and democratic rights of over half the city's population who have been driven to seek shelter in unauthorised housing. It goes on to say that, "the PUCL wishes to clarify that it does not advocate the individual's right to construct shelter in disregard of the city's planning regulations . . . The PUCL also maintains that the removal of existing unauthorised structures should . . . be a phased one . . ."

In the text of the pamphlet, the PUCL has emphasised that it does not claim any fundamental right for the hutmentdwellers to live on the pavements and

that no such right can in fact be claimed. It repeats that admission in Para. 48 of the pamphlet thus: "The PUCL categorically stated in the SC that the hutment dwellers had no fundamental right to live on the pavements or for that matter on open lands." And yet, the hutment dwellers have unlawfully and criminally encroached on the pavements and the open lands over which they had no right. In law, they are criminal offenders. Ironically enough, the PUCL has been championing the cause of these offenders. It is a cardinal principle of the judicial system prevalent in our country that if one does not have a right one cannot claim any relief from the court. Then, why this fuss of legal battles by the PUCL?

Nani Palkhivala has rebutted the PUCL's stand on the following lines: It is a case of misplaced mercy. The real point here is that the Municipal Commissioner is performing his statutory duty about which there never was and never can be any doubt. If a public official is seeking to perform what is indisputably his duty, how can the court prevent him from doing so? How can any court prevent a public official from enforcing the law? It would result in absolute chaos if the courts which are intended to assist in the enforcement of the law, were to be converted into instruments for preventing such enforcement. Law and order would totally break down, if such a situation were permitted to prevail.

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POLAND'S PRIZE PREDICAMENT

ROGER BOYES

LECH WALESA in self-defence: "Stop talking about my millions... I want to say, I have one suit; no, two, one still from my wedding. Four pairs of socks and two that need darning". The new Nobel Peace laureate is not one of the world's best dressed men. Every age moulds its heroes and the Polish workers of 1980 required their leader to be modest, God-fearing, spontaneous, a bit ragged at the edges; a man who could speak truths, be impudent to the political bosses and wear clothes that did not quite fit his stumpy frame.

As he sits in his living room under a large gaudy portrait of the Pope, it is clear that the maelstrom of Polish politics has not made him into a smooth-tongued statesman: the grammar slips, the moustache trembles, ash drops on the carpet.

The Nobel Prize has given Mr. Walesa a choice: he can play a waiting game, waiting for worker discontent to build up again, for the pendulum of Polish life to swing his way again. The Nobel Prize means that he will not be forgotten, will blunt the deluge of government propaganda against him. Or he can capitalise on the prize by becoming more active in the worker opposition to General Jaruzelski's policies. It seems unlikely (though still not impossible) that the authorities would arrest the former Solidarity chief if he met now with the leaders of the underground resistance. Life is embarrassing enough for the leadership without jailing a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

First indications—Mr. Walesa's donation of the prize money to the church fund for private farmers—are that the electrician will choose the waiting option, will cement his links with the Roman Catholic Church which has always counselled patience. Even with the prestige of the prize, the possibilities are not large, the scope for action restrained by the limits of Poland's economic crisis, the intransigence of the Government, vigilance of Poland's neighbours.

The real effect of the prize is to strike at the legitimacy of government policies towards Mr. Walesa and, by the extension, the Solidarity movement. The prize shows that the Government, a team of competent crisis managers and quite shrewd tacticians, has not boxed clever. It decided at too early a stage to exclude Mr. Walesa from the national equation.

When the authorities released Mr. Walesa in November 1982, after 11 months of internment, they trumpeted loudly that Mr. Walesa was the former leader of a former union, a private individual representing nobody. Therefore no dialogue could be held with him. But over the past year, Mr. Walesa's obtrusive presence has proved a constant reproach to General

Jaruzelski's Government, which claims that it is basing its policies on a real consensus and a constant dialogue with workers.

The solution offered by the collective brainpower within the Government has been a propaganda campaign that has repeatedly tried to discredit Mr. Walesa in the eyes of his fellow workers. The logic behind this: if the workers reject Mr. Walesa, then the fact that we are not talking to Mr. Walesa cannot be held against us.

The Government always had a choice too: it could have tried to institutionalise Mr. Walesa. By offering him a role—not within the new pro-government unions, which the former Solidarity leader could never have accepted—the authorities could have shown themselves ready to acknowledge Mr. Walesa's standing among Polish workers.

Had the Government tried to shape some form of conciliation council with the co-operation of the Church, and then given Mr. Walesa a chance to participate, it would have muffled his presence and at the same time harnessed his myth. The Nobel Peace Prize would thus have been an award not only to the Polish workers but also to the Polish Government. Had Mr. Walesa rejected such offers repeatedly, the Government could then have portrayed the Solidarity leader as a man of the past. As things stand, he is still a man of the undeclared future.

A warning signal must surely have been received by the Government when Pope John Paul II insisted on meeting Mr. Walesa in June. (It is this meeting above all that allowed the Norwegian Nobel Committee to award the prize without running the risk of being accused of playing in the Polish political game.) This showed the continuing significance of Mr. Walesa, even if that significance lies in a discreet "backseat" role for the Solidarity chief. Because of a failure of political imagination, Mr. Walesa has not been institutionalised but expelled into a vacuum.

Poland now faces the frankly absurd situation of a Nobel Peace laureate commuting to work every day as a maintenance electrician in the Lenin shipyards. This is not the Soviet Union: Walesa is not Andrei Sakharov, who can simply be exiled to a provincial city.

Mr. Walesa still has the respect of many workers, he has been given an explicitly public role by the Nobel committee, and the workers themselves have enough grievances against the Government for the whole mixture to be quite volatile. Oslo has helped to produce a strong and strange brew in Central Europe.

(Courtesy: *The Times*, London)

BOOK REVIEW

SHAME BY SALMAN RUSHDIE; RUPA & CO., Rs. 30.

PEOPLE WHO have met Salman Rushdie describe him as a quick, light-footed man with barely suppressed energy that finds diverse ways of manifesting itself. The best known form of releasing this inner energy has, of course, been his three books—*Grimus*, *Midnight's Children* and now *Shame*. *Midnight's Children* succeeded in the words of one reviewer, in "redrawing the literary map of India". *Shame* does the same, in a sense, for Pakistan.

The story takes place in modern-day Pakistan. The main events touched upon are the Bangladesh War, the succession of military rulers and Bhutto's execution. But Mr. Rushdie, who surfaces himself at several points in the novel, states that immigrants in Britain and their problems are also reflected in one of his characters.

The twin leads in the story are Omar Khayyam Shakil and Sufiya Zinobia Hyder. Shakil is "immaculately conceived", in the sense that he has three mothers and no one is sure who his true mother (or for that matter father) is, for the mothers (who are sisters) display identical symptoms of pregnancy and at the time of his birth are cloistered in a private room.

Soon after the birth, the sisters—Chunni, Munnee

and Bunny—shut themselves up in their house and proceed to devote all their time to the upbringing of Shakil. At the age of 12, he finally rebels against his claustrophobic confinement and his mothers' clinging love and demands to see the outside world.

We flit to the next scene of action—India. Here a young army captain called Raza Hyder finds himself a bride, Bilquis, one of the millions of refugees fleeing India. Hyder takes his wife home to Pakistan where she is befriended by Rani Humayun, her husband's cousin. Rani herself is due to be married shortly to Iskander Harappa, a rich playboy type, whose favourite carousing companion is none other than Shakil.

These two families, the Hyders and the Harappas along with Shakil, form the main cast of characters. Raza and Bilquis have two daughters, Sufiya Zinobia and Naveed Hyder. Sufiya becomes an idiot at a very early age due to brain fever and is nicknamed "Shame" by her mother. Out of the marriage between Rani Humayun and Iskander Harappa comes Arjumand Harappa, a very beautiful girl who would rather be a boy. The last two characters of importance are Iskander Harappa's cousin, Little Mir Harappa (they hate each other's guts), and his son Haroun Harappa (who idolises his uncle Iskander, hates his father Little Mir, loves Raza Hyder's daughter Naveed and disdains the passion of Arjumand, his second cousin). A bit complex, but Mr. Rushdie's narrative overcomes all that.



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Now for the allegories. Though Rushdie says he is writing about an imaginary country, he says it in the sense that it is not only Pakistan. As he avers: "The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality."

The characters are readily identifiable. Raza Hyder is a thinly veiled General Zia-ul-Haq; Iskander Harappa—Bhutto; Arjumand—Benazir; Haroun Harappa—the leader of the *Al-Zulfikar* terrorist gang.

The story follows Iskander's rise to power, his induction of cousin Raza Hyder as commander-in-chief and his subsequent death at the hands of his erstwhile protege. Then Raza Hyder, after a four-year reign, is himself toppled. Meanwhile, Omar Khayyam has married Raza's daughter Sufiya who is slowly being possessed by a demon referred to as the Beast. In her moments of madness she and the Beast within take revenge on the world which mocks her inadequacies, by committing particularly brutal murders. Without going into the intricate sub-plotting that marks the novel, it is enough to say that in the final pages just about everyone turns up dead, including the hero and most of his supporting cast.

It seems a rather apocalyptic view of Pakistan's immediate future, but as political satire it is devastating. Mr. Rushdie's vaulting imagination and crackling humour keep the reader constantly amazed. And his language. Here, we don't have the studied elegance of a Naipaul or the flowery imagery of a Marquez, but rather strains of every kind of English spoken in the sub-continent mixed with the Queen's English. A delightful *khichdi*. As Mr. Rushdie explains: "We can't simply use the language in the way the British did: it needs remaking for our own purpose."

What is Mr. Rushdie trying to say through the novel? He says quite clearly that he is obsessed with three things: the ruin of the country of his birth, Pakistan, by the army autocrats; the fact that he is an immigrant in his adoptive land, England; and the ill-treatment of the Asians by the British. But he is also, in a sense, trying to get free of his past and accept the reality of the country he lives in.

All in all, an absorbing book. With every one of his novels Rushdie has managed to create wholly new dimensions in the world of fiction. In effect, he has set standards which other authors will find hard to match.

—David Davidar

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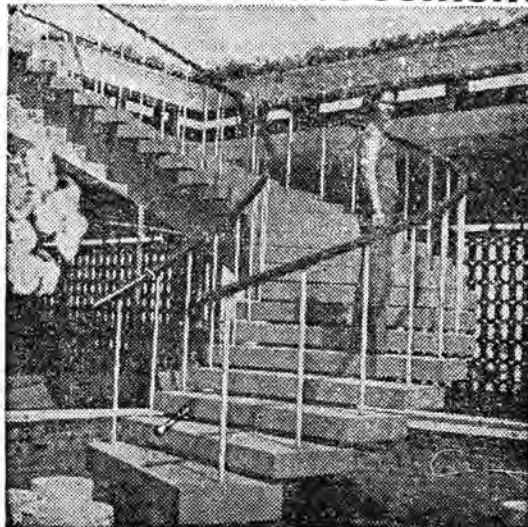
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WITH MANY VOICES

Anyone can become angry—that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way—that is not easy.

—Aristotle quoted in *The Herald Tribune*,
September 22.

Writers are like race horses, once they are past their prime they should be shot.

—Kamala Das quoted in *The Observer*, October 2.

Mr. David Steel took complete rest from politics during quite a long part of his speech to the Liberal Assembly yesterday.

—Frank Johnson in *The Times*, September 24.

The bells in Manila no longer toll for Benigno Aquino Jr., the opposition leader treacherously slain a month ago. They toll now for the erratic and arrogant Marcos dictatorship.

—*The Herald Tribune*, September 24.

We must deal with the Soviet Union not as we would like it to be, but as it is.

—Mrs. Thatcher quoted in *The Times*, October 10.

I will never meet her (Indira Gandhi) again. The world's biggest people can be very small-minded and trivial in personal life.

—Khuswant Singh quoted in *The Mid-Day*,
October 9.

You can't blow dust away without making a lot of people cough.

—Prince Philip quoted in *The Herald Tribune*,
September 16.

Peace simply means Communist world control.

—Lenin quoted in *The Times*, April 21.

They (the United Nations) should stay here in the city of New York because every country needs a cess-pool.

—Mayor Koch of New York quoted in *The Observer*, October 2.

There is no public money—only taxpayer's money.

—Mrs. Thatcher quoted in *The Observer*,
October 23.