

Some Critical Issues in Industrialization

(from a Sermon prepared for 'Industrial Sunday')

S. K. BISWAS

A cartoon in a Communist newspaper once depicted the church as a dead leafless tree. On the ground lay scattered dead leaves. A group of elderly clergymen were busily collecting the leaves and pinning them onto the trunk of the tree! In one stroke the church was depicted as both dead and irrelevant in our world. In so far as the church is preoccupied with herself and her self-perpetuation, in so far as we continue to live in a splendid isolation, in so far as the flood of life and of history sweeps past our tightly shut gothic doors the charge is true.

Taking the charge seriously I *shall this evening try to bring out some characteristics of our emerging industrial society and see what is our responsibility as members of a common humanity who share in its goals and aspirations, its failures and frustrations.* For this is Christ's call to us as a church to be involved in his *agony and his hope.* We must make no mistake about this—I repeat that it is as a member of a common humanity I speak for that is our calling—we know of no other. Any notion of our role that does not include this is a sham and a fraud, and a betrayal of the mission of *Him who became man that we might be made fully men.* It is when we have identified ourselves with the hopes and the fears, the struggles and the achievements of our age that we shall find Christ for he is there in the midst. He is the Revolutionary, He is the Manager, He is the Worker, He is the Leftist and the Rightist, He is the unemployed man, He is the centre and heart of all the forces that shape and mould our society for good. *He is the Priest and the Victim* in every area of *strife and tension, of hope and despair, of anguish and achievement.* If we cannot find Him there we shall not find Him anywhere. This is not a play of words but our conviction born of experience.

In my analyses of the newly emerging industrial society I take Durgapur as my model. It represents in microcosm our new India. It holds within itself the seeds of success and

failure, of creativeness and despair, of a human and sub-human society. It represents the choice which faces India today.

First the emerging society is characterized by change. Ten years ago Durgapur was a sal jungle noted in the history of Bengal for its dacoits—today it is a gigantic complex of heavy industries. Ten years ago there were a few scattered villages—today there are seven handsome townships with every modern facility. Ten years ago paddy-fields stretched as far as the eye could see—today a mammoth steel plant broods magnificently over the scene. Ten years ago the population numbered 2,000—today it is over 200,000. In truth, the bulldozers have swept away overnight thousands of years of history.

But the change has not only been physical, it has been deeply spiritual as well. Together with the villages, the bulldozers have swept away old values, old ways of life, old relationships, old isolations. The very foundations of the social structures have been shaken and condemned and demolished. Men and money from every part of the world have poured in to build and to mould and to shape. *It is the change from a static to a dynamic state, from resignation and acceptance to aspiration and the will to do.* A society which has been slumbering for generations has woken and stretched as a hungry giant—looking for a way of life that will offer fulfilment, looking for the offer of a better future. For the first time economically, politically and socially the people of India have the knowledge that *they can change things.* That they are not the *mere pawns of the fates and the furies* but have within themselves *the power to go forward to reach and fashion a new earth if not a new heaven.* Society stands at the cross-roads, changing almost hourly, wondering which way to turn, which path to follow.

The giant of the masses has awakened and is hungry. His aspirations are many and his appetite large. *The masses have seen the vision of a greater and richer life and they struggle out to grasp the changed situation with both hands.* In a society on the move where age-old concepts, values, relationships and structures are being overthrown, *unrest, violence and uncertainty* are inevitable. The pangs of rebirth are always painful and as Mao Tse-tung has said, 'Revolution is not exactly an old Ladies' tea-party.'

But it is my contention that the forces of change set free by the processes of industrialization are of God and are to be welcomed wholeheartedly. To us is given the responsibility to see that the change is in the right direction. It is the mandate given this generation to shape the direction of the change for the future of those children yet unborn. We live on a razor's edge, for the force of change can as easily be destructive, ultimately, as creative—yet the responsibility is ours and we cannot abdicate.

We shall not do this without sacrifice and suffering. Our generation must be willing to build for the future even though it does not taste of the fruits itself. It will require much patience, much sensitivity, much sanity and much love to help the new life to take root and to grow. It is for us to be involved in the midst of this changing situation so that we may share its birth pangs and act as midwives of the new age. This cannot be done by arm-chair critics or by those who watch the game from the side-lines—it can only be done by those who are totally identified in the situation. Our people need a vision—without it they perish. They need to learn many lessons not least that change, permanent change, must be bought with a price. It is for us to pay that price first. Our people, too, need to know that the fruits of change will be shared justly and that they will not be defrauded.

All of us need to be reminded of the words of Chairman Mao, 'We must thoroughly clear away all ideas amongst cadres of winning easy victories through good luck, without a hard and bitter struggle and without sweat and blood. Anybody who holds that change can be brought about without sacrifice and suffering is not worthy of consideration.'

The second characteristic of the newly emerging industrial society is its creativity. Industry by its very nature is creative: new methods, new machines, new processes. Innovation and experimentation are its life-blood in an ever-growing competitive market. The mastery of the forces of nature, the harnessing of power, the diverse use of that power are its incessant concerns. But creativity is not just limited to machines and products. An equally creative field is man management—the understanding of motivations of what really makes a man and his world, the asking of the ultimate questions of 'why' and 'whither', the whole field of social psychology.

It is here that industry in India has largely failed. The creative faculty is limited to the very few. By and large, the mass of the workers are condemned to an uncreative drudgery. They are denied any share in the creative field of decision-making in every sphere. Man is made in the image of God and God is essentially a Creator. If you take away a man's creative faculty not only do you deny him his birthright but you also unleash an immense frustration and an evil; the consequences of such folly are with us today.

Management assumes that men are by nature lazy, irresponsible, lacking in leadership, unidentified with the company's objectives, easily led by demagogues. And so it follows that men need to be managed by close supervision, they need to be surrounded by a complex web of rules, they need have no share in decision-making. This is not the way to make men human: this is the way to kill them. What happens? Men do become lazy, they do the minimum of work, they keep asking for money—which gives them the only kind of satisfaction

they are supposed to need. But all the time they crave participation, they crave status, they crave for recognition and self-fulfilment. Regimentation is not only in the factories, it is in the colonies as well. The place in which a man must live, the school his children must attend, the time he must take his holiday, his place of recreation, his food, all these are laid down for him. When this is done two things follow: (a) the worker expects as his right that management must always be responsible for these things, and (b) he loses all initiative, sense of responsibility, sense of creativity, sense of belonging.

It is vital that we believe in the possibility that man can change and that he does change. We hear very often that modern technology does not allow it. This is a kind of modern superstition. *Man is still today the decision-maker.* We should make it our fundamental principle to give participation to as many people as possible. Man must be allowed to organize his sphere of work and daily living. Man must be MASTER over the economic world. What is needed is the reshaping of the structure of economic life, the reshaping of work which means *participation, self-determination, engagement.* Man is still today the decision-maker.

Industrialization has after centuries made it possible for the masses to be creative in change. Man is grasping at this but is also being denied it. There is a failure here to understand man, his motivations, his aspirations, his dreams, the needs of his ego, his need for self-fulfilment. There is an urgent need to help men to understand in this area of human relations or else we shall continue to commit the greatest of blunders. West Bengal, noted for her leadership in the past, is, I say, giving it in the present as well, *for here there is a protest against benevolent dictatorship,* here there is some articulation of the voice of the masses to have their rightful share in the world of decision-making. Here there are watchdogs who will make us *question our assumptions,* who will not allow cases to go by default. Revolutions are brought about not by actions so much as by *asking the right questions.*

For the sake of a superficial industrial peace we cannot allow the birthright of man to be sold for a mess of pottage. *This* questions some fundamental assumptions of the capitalistic system.

Where there is no vision the people perish.

Thirdly, industrialization is characterized by choice. Industrialization is a liberating force. It offers a choice to a much larger segment of the human spectrum, a truly natural choice for the first time of a way of life, of values. The industrial society is essentially a pluralistic one and a pluralistic society allows many systems of political, economical, religious and social ideologies to co-exist. It calls men into maturity and adulthood and demands that they choose. The unleashed power of technological invention is not in itself good or evil.

If we live in the turmoil that it creates, if we have suffered global wars it has made possible, if we fear the future more than we hope for it, then we do so because that power has more often been used at the service of apathy, of selfishness, of evil than it has been enlisted for positive purposes. There is no reason why this power should not be used to create a future with far wider prospects for the individual than now exists—with much greater liberty for him to live the abundant life—A LIFE OF HOPE AND JOY.

Change, creativeness—choice: To this generation has been given a great trust, to shape decisively the future. The problems are complex, the values unknown—we cannot wait for some expert to do it for us. We have to set up models and find a strategy for creating values. Ours is a fluid situation. It is also an existing one. It is wonderful to live just in this age—we live not in despair but in great hope and confidence, for the forms of change, the avenues of creativity, the choices offered are by God. We have many hard lessons to learn, many mistakes to commit, many choices to make, but the spirit of man is not easily quenched and the work of God will not fail. It is God who brings about this change, it is God who continues his creative work through us men, it is God who continues to offer to men a choice. It is in Him that we shall trust. It is God who calls us to involvement and participation and we shall answer that call; it is God who shall say at the end, 'It is finished and it is good', and we shall answer *Amen*.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

The Rev. Fr. Paul Verghese is Principal of the Orthodox Seminary, Kottayam, Kerala.

Sri A. C. Dharmaraj is a Secretary of the National Christian Council, Nagpur, Maharashtra.

The Rev. Fr. Subir Biswas is Associate Director of the Ecumenical, Social and Industrial Institute, Durgapur, West Bengal.