

The
BENGAL TRAGEDY

TUSHARKANTI GHOSH.

**HERO PUBLICATIONS
LAHORE.**

The
BENGAL TRAGEDY

The
BENGAL
TRAGEDY

TUSHAR KANTI GHOSH.

212
GENERAL LIBRARY

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The publishers are grateful to M/s. Ram Lal Kapur & Sons, Paper Merchants, Lahore, distributors of Titaghar Paper Mills, for their kindness to have supplied paper for this book at Control rates.

The
Bengal Tragedy

TUSHAR KANTI GHOSH

Editor :

Amrita Bazar Patrika.

1944

HERO PUBLICATIONS

6, LOWER MALL, LAHORE.

Printed by Gopal Singh,
at the Punjab Electric
Press, Mohan Lal Road,
Lahore.



First published ... April, 1944



Published by S. Durlab Singh,
Prop: HERO PUBLICATIONS,
6, Lower Mall, Lahore.

“ Mr. Amery pointed out that the Government, of India considers that the abnormal mortality due to the famine and to disease in the last five months of 1943 has not exceeded a million. There were no cheers in the House over this too complacent announcement. A million deaths from famine and its attendant diseases in five months in one corner of the British Empire : that is a horrible fact which must challenge alike our honour and our statesmanship ”

—*New Chronicle, London.*

“ Under the present system of government responsibility for breakdown inescapably rests in the last resort upon Authority in Britain and its immediate representatives here. Every British citizen is necessarily shamed and sallied when his Indian fellow subjects die of starvation in Bengal.”

—*The Statesman, Calcutta.*

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

We publish good books on Indian and Foreign politics and also Biographies of National or International personalities every now and then.

(i) If you can send any good manuscript on any similar subject, it will receive our careful attention.

(ii) If you like to remain in touch with our publications let us know your name and address on a postcard and get your name registered on our Mailing List.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

The book was never intended to be as it is. I had a mind to present it in some different form but thanks to the generous response of Mr. Tushar Kanti Ghosh, he has reduced my work considerably.

Being a publisher with little of enterprising habits, the harrowing news about the vast human destruction in Bengal compelled me to leave Lahore for Calcutta to see for myself the boons of two hundred years of long administration of the British Empire and witness personally how cheaply human lives are allowed to go in the Empire's second city—the glorious land which gave birth to some of the best men in India and perhaps in the whole world.

The land of C. R. Dass, Sen Gupta, Subhas Bose and Tagore had been a place of great attraction for me ever since I entered in the publishing line and even earlier. I had heard and read much about Bengal and the Bengali patriots and also written a little about them but alas! my desire to pay homage to this place could be fulfilled only when both the great heroes of the Hero Publications Shyt. Subhas Chandra Bose and Shyt. Rabindra Nath Tagore, to whose greatness and sacrifices this institution owes its existence, had been swept away from Calcutta,

one on some political errand and the second to an eternal peace.

When the Punjab Calcutta Mail steamed in at the Howrah Junction and on my way to Harrison Road, I saw some destitutes loitering hither and thither in search of a few morsels of bread; the prophetic observations of Poet Tagore rang into my ears, which he had made in the course of his address on the celebration of his eightieth birthday. "The wheels of fate" he said, "will some day compel the English to give up their Indian Empire, but what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the streams of their centuries administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth will they leave behind them. I had at one time believed that the springs of civilization will issue out of the heart of Europe. And to-day when I am about to quit the world that stubborn faith has gone bankrupt altogether."

There is a difference between seeing things personally and hearing and reading them. By the time I reached Calcutta the Government had begun removing the destitutes from the city obviously to avoid the sight of American and other foreign journalists and soldiers, but from what little I have seen and judged by coming in personal contact with the destitutes and some Calcutta friends, I have no hesitation whatever to say that now when the British Government is expected to retire from this country voluntarily or forced by the world opinion, they

are leaving the Bengal famine as the blackest spot on their long administration, hundred times blacker perhaps than the much-advertised Black Hole Tragedy of Siraj-ul-Daula.

From what has been reproduced at the end of this book under the caption "Horrible Scences" and from what has been dealt with by the mighty journalist in his articles, I don't think any thing more is required to provide a first-hand story of the tragedy but still I feel that I must share with my readers what I have seen in the city of palaces.

After taking my evening meals one day when coming from a Punjabi Hotel from the Machhua Bazar Street I turned towards the College Street I came across a very pathetic scene. It was a dark, dreadful winter evening. Calcutta, which is direct under the spell of the Japanese bombers is darkest still when there is a permanent black-out in the city and suburbs. Crowds of men were going one way or the other, on tramways, buses and rikshaws and thousands of them were running on foot. In this dark crowded atmosphere all eyes were suddenly turned towards the cries of a destitute woman, half-naked, with a small torn piece of *Dhoti*, sufficient only to cover her most secret and sacred organs, bare-footed, with her unruly, undressed and uncared dirty long hair, young in age but old and worn-out in appearance. She was rushing madly making her way out of the crowd crying Purana ! Purana ! Where have you gone Purana ! The woman destitute was coming back greatly tired after finishing her

day's enterprise in search of food with her three tiny children and a young daughter Purana, when in the dark crowd her daughter lost touch of the family. The mother was mad in search of her daughter, but all was in vain. She would some time enter in one lane and some time the other till she fell down after striking against a water pump, sustained serious injuries and became unconscious. She was removed by a good old man to his shop nearby. I do not know what happened to the poor woman after that but as I proceeded, I could not help thinking again and again over the endless miseries to which the village folk of Bengal had been subjected. Starvation alone was not the lot of the poverty-stricken people. They had left their villages in despair and rushed to Calcutta to find out food for themselves and their children but what they got was even something worse than starvation. Families of villagers, unfed or semi-fed, lying on the roadside platforms, in the corners of some streets on the bridges or near the railway station without any protection, without any cloth even to cover themselves and their small babies during the winter nights, has been a common sight in Calcutta for a fairly long time. I have actually seen destitutes flickering their fingers in the dirty slums in search of a morsel of bread.

It is said that babies were seen dying actually at the breasts of their mothers, youngmen hanging themselves and committing suicides, girls selling for a handful of rice or a few pieces of silver coins, husbands leaving breaths

before their beloveds and wives dying before the very eyes of their husbands after long and wearied battles with starvation. A gentleman was telling me that once a heap of small babies, say about a hundred or so of the age of less than two or three months, was collected and set fire to at a single place. I have myself seen the dead body of a child of less than two months lying on the bank of River Hoogly near the Howrah Bridge. Crows were sitting around his dead body and enjoying their feast.

It was all a pathetic sight and as I have already said, it is not possible to give a true picture to the readers even inspite of the best efforts. Some Bengali friends told me that they were not so much terrified by the visit of the Japanese bombers. They were pained to hear of the havoc caused by Midnapore Cyclone and Floods but his too did not frighten them so much as the cries of the dying people at the mid-nights in the streets of Calcutta.

Naturally the question arises as to what led to this most poignant of tragedies. Whether it was a natural calamity or a man-made catastrophe, and if it is a man-made famine, who is responsible for all this outrage and scandal? I would have attempted to give an answer to these questions but I feel that it has been amply answered by the author of the book in his articles.

The *Statesman*, the Anglo-Indian daily of Calcutta and an exponent of the official point of view has also very neatly summed up the reply to the above question. I reproduce below some of the extracts from the able

editor's article and I am sure that after going through it the reader will have absolutely no difficulty in reaching the conclusion.

"Famine has not been formally declared because, it has been explained, Government is not yet equipped with resources for assuming the heavy responsibilities the declaration would entail. For the omission, the Ministry has been vigorously attacked in the Assembly and was able to make little reply, for disorder prevented the Revenue Minister from detailing what is being done. There has been recognition that famine conditions prevail ; relief is being organised on that basis, and the Ministry's policy is to take relief to every village and union where it is needed. That, in the province of Bengal's size and dominantly village character, is a policy of large dimensions. Certainly the open admission of famine in a large, exposed war base would call forth stern reproof from the British Parliament and people and give the enemy splendid material for propaganda.

"This sickening catastrophe is man-made. So far as we are aware, all of India's previous famines originated primarily from calamities of nature. But this one is accounted for by no climatic failure, rainfall has been generally plentiful. What the province's state would now be had drought been added to Governmental bungling, is an appalling thought. Parts of the Bengal district of Midnapore were indeed devastated last year by cyclone ; during the wet season now ending, areas in

S.W. Bengal have been much flooded, disordering the province's communications. But those local misfortunes cannot account for a tithe of the present dreadful sufferings. Japan's conquest of Burma, and the resultant loss of Burma's rice exports, has been a big factor. So has the major strategic switch-over within India necessitated in 1941-42 by the sudden Japanese belligerence, which the Viceroy-Designate Lord Wavell last week vividly described in a London speech. This set up severe internal stresses. Continued rapid growth of population may also have had influence.

"But outstandingly the largest factor has been shameful lack of foresight and planning capacity by India's own civil Governments, Central and Provincial. To the discerning, Japan's hostility was no surprise; the surprise rather lay in it not happening sooner. Having privy knowledge of British military weakness in Malaya and Burma, Authority in New Delhi presumably must have envisaged loss to India of Burma's rice exports, and the consequent radical upset in the essential foodgrains trade throughout the eastern provinces. Yet nothing was done to ensure that the scores of millions of unmartial people being thrust by events in the war-zone should have adequate nourishment. A whole year slipped by after Pearl Harbour before New Delhi even set up a Food Department.

... ..
... ..

"We say with deliberation that the present Bengal famine constitutes the worst and most reprehensible administrative breakdown in India since the political

disorders of 1930-31. Government, despite its ramshackle structure, has since that date acquired impressive attitude for handling political troubles; this was shown in 1932-34 and again last year. But it has fallen down heavily over a primary economic obligation.

“Under the present system of government responsibility for breakdown inescapably rests in the last resort upon Authority in Britain, and its immediate representatives here. Every British citizen is necessarily shamed and sullied when his Indian fellow-subjects die of starvation in Bengal

... ..
... ..
... ..

In the end, I must express my deep sense of gratitude to Shyt. Tushar Kanti Ghosh who has at my first request sent a series of his soul-stirring articles for this compilation. As I have already mentioned, this book was never intended to be as it is. I had a mind to get one article each from Dr. Shyama Parshad, Mr. Tushar Kanti Ghosh, the Mayor of Calcutta, Pt. Hirday Nath Kunzru, Mrs. Vijya Lakshmi Pandit and some other prominent men in our public life who had personally witnessed the tragedy with a small introduction of my own to provide first-hand account to the readers of Hero Publications but when I received from the great journalist a series of his articles every word of which deserved to be given the widest possible publicity, I changed my mind and decided to compile the book in its present form.

I believe, my attempt will be amply awarded if my countrymen are able to know who the real culprits of the tragedy are.

March 20, 1944

DURLAB SINGH.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGES
Editor's Preface ...	7
I. New Food Gospel ...	17
II. A Food Millennium ...	20
III. Yet No Light ...	24
IV. No Mere Civil Problem ...	29
V. Calcutta's Dilemma ...	34
VI. All for Political Ends ...	39
VII. How Long ? ...	44
VIII. A Hush Hush Policy ...	48
IX. Homicidal Callousness ...	50
X. Rotten to the Core ...	54
XI. Whose is the Responsibility ? ...	57
XII. Those Bitter Lessons ...	62
XIII. The Need of the Hour ...	67
XIV. After Famine, Disease ...	71
XV. Whose Responsibility ...	75
XVI. Give Food or Get Out ...	78

APPENDIX I

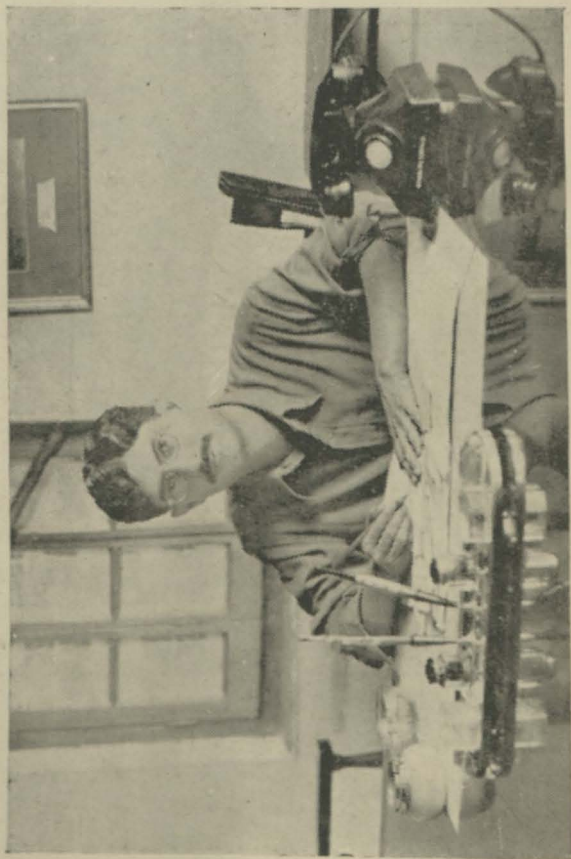
Catastrophe of Unprecedented Nature ...	83
---	----

APPENDIX II

Horrible Scenes ...	94
---------------------	----

APPENDIX III

Responsibility ? ...	103
----------------------	-----



SHYRI: TUSHAR KANTI GHOSH

CHAPTER I

NEW FOOD GOSPEL

Let not the public lose its perspective. Profiteers must not be spared. On that all progressive elements are agreed. But who are these profiteers? How have they escaped so long from the dire consequences of the law and with impunity? How do they continue to carry on their activities? Either they exist or they do not. We refuse to believe that a Government armed with adequate and extensive powers and fully alive to its responsibilities could not track down these men and suppress them completely. If the Government's charge that hoarders and profiteers are abroad has any foundation in fact, the conclusion is irresistible that men in high places either abet them or are so powerless that they have been forced to yield ground to these food gangsters. In either case the Government's record is discreditable. We make no distinction between the Centre and the constituent units. They must all take their shares of responsibility for the distressing situation that has been created.

But are the hoards an adequate explanation of the acute crisis that faces us to day? There is the vicious spiral of rising prices owing to scarcity or to monetary

mal-adjustments. There is lack of co-ordination in policy and programme between the Centre and the Provinces and States. There are reports of ill-planned but independent purchases by agents of the military authorities and of big employers of industrial labour. There are reports of movements of foodgrains from place to place for purposes of export out of the country. Nothing substantial has so far been done to bring the system under control by a comprehensive scheme. In the result the minimum requirements of the civil population have been starved. On his re-entry to the Secretariat more than three months ago Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy assured us, upon his analysis of the stock situation that there was absolutely no cause for panic. He is now wiser though not sadder. On 3rd August, while urging the opening of free kitchens throughout Bengal, the Hon'ble the Minister for Civil Supplies started singing in a different tune altogether. He admitted that the distress was widespread. What is more, this distress, according to him, "is likely to become acute in the months of September, October and November." This is alarming. Even to-day countless men and women in Calcutta go about searching for filthy scraps from stinking dustbins. Dead bodies are found lying in numbers in public thoroughfares. The sufferings of people in the mafussil, is reported from day to day beggar description. The prospects for three months that lie ahead are bleak, bitter and terrible.

During the last several months the handling of the food situation by the authorities has been a scandal. Now it has passed that stage. It is so shameful and cruel. Nobody is prepared any longer to listen to the music of Ministers and mandarins. It is no time for music. It is no time for amateurish experiments or net practice on the treacherous food wicket. What is needed is food, more food and nothing but food. The Government must find it, hoarder or no hoarder, profiteer or no profiteer, inflation or deflation, Mr. L. S. Amery or his son, dear little John. The people must be saved from starvation. A long food debate in this crisis is a cruel joke. Blue books, memoranda and long-winded reports upon food are no better than spiteful vengeance. Let us cease talking in the air or fighting the mysterious hidden food monster or throwing the responsibilities on the slender shoulders of poor derelict human beings. Let us face facts, stark and naked facts. If the Government is not in a position to solve the crisis, it is time it closed down peacefully, quietly and without any unworthy attempt at desperate resistance.

CHAPTER II

A FOOD MILLENNIUM ?

New Delhi's elder statesmen sat down to listen patiently on Thursday to another interesting food discourse given by Major-General Wood, the retiring Secretary to the Food Department, on behalf of Lord Linlithgow's Government. The country is crying for food. She is given instead the learned texts on how the foodgrains elude the consumer and paralyse the machinery of co-operation between the Centre and the Provinces. What is peculiar is that even in this senseless but provocative pastime the Government of India does not follow a concerted plan. Compare, for instance, Major-General Wood's speech with that of the Hon'ble Sir Jogendra Singh Member for Education, Health and Lands, and you will at once realise to what ridiculous lengths Lord Linlithgow's Government may go. What then is the policy of the Government of India ? Has it at all got any policy ? Major-General Wood defends the basic plan, control and rationing. Sir Jogendra Singh pleads for normal channels of trade, advocates the cause of the free trade and businessman. Which of these men speaks the mind of Lord Linlithgow's

Government—Major General Wood or the Hon'ble Member for Education, Health and Lands? This discrepancy is curiously amazing. It seems that Lord Linlithgow's Government is composed of men whose business is not to serve the Government or to promote the welfare of the people but to defend, each in his own way, the interests to which he may happen to be affiliated for political or social reasons. This is the logical development of Lord Linlithgow's much-boasted scheme of expansion of the Executive Council without any Central plan or a progressive outlook.

Sir Jogendra Singh confesses that everybody's confidence has been shaken, except perhaps his own. What is that, we ask, due to? Is it not because men like him rather than the leaders of the nation occupy the seats of authority at New Delhi? Is it not because those who occupy those seats pursue their own private ends rather than seek the well being of the people in whose name they are supposed to run the Administration? Britain, too, has been caught by the war. There is no shaking of confidence. Russia has been caught by the war. The Red Army fights gallantly the battle of liberation. China has been caught by the war. The heroic exploits of the ill-equipped Chinese forces under Generalissimo Chiang Kaishek are now a legend. Why is confidence shaken in this country? Why do the Governments of Provinces and States distress each other and also Sir Jogendra Singh and his colleagues in the Viceroy's Executive Council? If Major-General Wood's discourse is evasive, misleading and unhelpful, Sir

Jogendra Singh's thesis is crude, impertinent and dangerous. Major-General Wood is reported to have earned his exit from the Food Department of the Government of India. The country will be glad to learn of Sir Jogendra Singh's prospects in preferment. As to Major-General Wood's attempt to shift the responsibility for the food crisis in Bengal and other areas on to the Provinces concerned, we can only tell him that the poor starving consumer has absolutely no interest in this barren controversy. The responsibility is the responsibility of the Government, whatever the ultimate source of the authority and sanction of the State. If certain Provincial Governments as suggested, misbehaved, they should have been peremptorily superseded. There is ample power in that regard vested in the Governor General. And it is no credit to Lord Linlithgow and his Government that they slept all the while and were building castles in their dreamland while the Provincial Governments blundered, bungled and mismanaged the entire business.

Coming now to Bengal proper Major-General Wood has stated that in all addition to the assistance brought to this Province by free trade, the Government of India has delivered to it over one train a day of foodgrain from the 1st January to the 31st June. Then the *aus* crop is beginning to be harvested and would progressively come into the market during September. This crop, according to Major-General Wood's calculation, will provide fully for the rice requirements of the entire

population of Bengal for 90 days if her domestic resources were brought under some form of controlled distribution. Then the *aman* crop comes to be harvested in December. In addition, the Government of India under the basic plan stands pledged to put Bengal during next few months in possession of 30 per cent of all the rice, 33 per cent of all millets, 58 per cent of all wheat and 25 per cent of all gram of all the surpluses and resources that would come into its hands. It is the picture of a new heaven and a new earth. A food millennium is in the making. The Government of India has ordained it. The Government of India's Food Secretary has proclaimed it. Does Bengal starve? Why should there be starvation, this all-pervasive hunger and misery, bodies lying unclaimed in public thoroughfares, emaciated human beings searching for food in filthy dustbins and hundreds of men and women running to and fro crying piteously for food—why should these heart-rending scenes of social wrong and inequity be enacted in the midst of this bounteous plenty? Is it then a dream, an aberration, a phantom of the monster that devours the food resources that are Bengal's? Or, is it that His Excellency the Governor's Council of Ministers is frittering away these resources thoughtlessly or putting them in a hidden pool lest, as Mr. Amery once suggested, the people of Bengal should bring disease and pestilence by over-eating? Either Major-General Wood is right or the Bengal Ministry is right. The onus is on the latter to answer Major-General Wood's challenge and Sir Jogendra Singh's unqualified accusation.

CHAPTER III

YET NO LIGHT

We feel called upon once again to refer to the food debate in the Central Legislature in view of the alarming situation with which we are confronted. Prices are rising. Scarcity of foodgrains is being increasingly felt. Reports of deaths due to starvation are pouring in. Nature in her naked irrepressible cruelty is making her own contributions to the scenes of general devastations. On Thursday two different voices were heard in the Council of State from the Treasury Benches. Major-General Wood took his stand upon a policy and scheme of control and rationing. Sir Jogendra Singh passionately pleaded for the trader and businessman. On 11th August, the new Food Member, Sir Jawala Prasad Srivastava, intervened in the debate with a speech full of sugarcandy effusions. To Major General Wood fell the task of winding up the debate. Sir Jawala Prasad's speech hardly deserves any notice. It was all a piece of infantile sentimentality. There was no plan, no purpose no direction in his vague, goodwill gesture. The question is not one of co-operation. There is no sense in asking for it, except upon the basis of a concrete scheme related to the actual situation.

Major-General Wood, however, ventured to accept Mr. Hossain Imam's challenge and cited figures in his possession to controvert the charge that exports of foodgrains outside India's borders during the year were valued at more than Rs. 47 crores. The gallant Food Secretary went further and poured ridicule upon the story of "vast exports, vast Army purchases and vast denial transactions." In the first seven months of the year 1943 total exports of foodgrains were less than 100,000 tons against a normal average export of 750,000 tons. From April, 1942, to February, 1943, the total exports of foodgrains through the Port of Calcutta were 48,480 tons. None of these exports was the produce of Bengal. Rice accumulated as a result of the denial policy amounted to 30,000 tons of which 27,000 tons were re-sold in Bengal for local consumption and only 100 tons from the remaining balance were made over to the Army. During the whole year of 1942 the foodgrains purchased for the Defence Services in Bengal amounted to 7,000 tons. In 1943 there were no such purchases. During the last ten months there have been no exports by land from Bengal and the Government of India has now totally prohibited all exports of rice from the country. This, in short, is Major-General Wood's story. It comes to this that neither the denial policy nor the alleged reckless purchases for the Army nor the exports from the country are in any way responsible for the present food anarchy in the whole of India, especially in Bengal.

We are not in a position to say either 'yes' or 'no' to Food Secretary's contention, although in a press communique issued by the Indian Chamber of Commerce with the apparent approval of the Bengal National Muslim and Marwari Chambers of Commerce, it is stated that early this month there was a large consignment of rice for South Africa from Calcutta. We cannot vouch for the authenticity of this statement. Of course, Major-General Wood brings his figures of exports of foodgrains through the Port of Calcutta upto February, 1943. The months that follow—March, April, May, June, July and August—are left out. It is difficult to account for this omission, except on the ground that the Government of India is suspicious of swift, moving events and is, as a general rule, behind time. If, however, the statement made by the Indian Chamber of Commerce has any foundation in fact, the conclusion is irresistible that no reliance is to be placed on the Central Government's professions. The Government of India has repeatedly told us that exports have been totally prohibited. Major-General Wood reiterates that assertion with all the emphasis of which he is capable. Such a grave charge of breach of promise as is contained in the statement of the Indian Chamber of Commerce must not be allowed to go unnoticed by the authorities concerned. If there is substance in this charge, not a word uttered by Lord Linlithgow's Government or any person authorised to speak in its behalf is to be believed. If, on the other hand, the charge is found to be baseless, the

Indian Chamber of Commerce must be prepared to face the consequences. The Chamber has thrown out a direct and open challenge to the Government of India and we feel that the latter must meet it promptly and adequately.

Assuming, however, that all that Major-General Wood has said in the Council of State is accurate in every meticulous detail, the Central Government owes it to itself and to the people not only to explain this increasing scarcity of foodgrains but to adopt without the slightest hesitation drastic measures for the purpose of bringing the situation under control and placing food at the disposal of the people at prices within their means. If it means suppression of any Provincial Government, the competent authorities must not flinch. If it involves ruthless suppression of the private trader or businessman and forcible seizure of foodgrain, the public will welcome it. The country must be saved from starvation. Dying men, women and children, emaciated by hunger or thinned by physical and mental agony, have the right to demand of the State which alone by means of its coercive apparatus and its organisational sanction, can meet it. Major-General Wood has spoken about the "basic plan." He has no doubt in his mind that the Government of India has a definite food policy. We are glad. But why does he seek to evade answering a simple question? What, one asks, is the food crisis due to? Why is this scarcity? How is this vicious spiral of rising prices to be accounted for? The Army purchases

are no factor. Exports from India are a fairy tale. Denial of rice is a myth. What, then, is the reason for this distressful condition in all parts of the country? If, in this tragic drama, the villain is the private trader or profiteer, is the Government so powerless that it cannot bring him within the clutches of the law? If it is, it is time the Government filed up.

One word more, Pandit Hirdaynath Kunzru put some pertinent questions to the Government regarding the food position in Bengal. Was Lord Linlithgow's Government, he asked, taking any steps to ensure proper distribution of foodgrains in Bengal at reasonable prices? Were the supplies delivered to the Bengal Government going underground for the benefit of profiteers? What stocks of rice and other foodgrains had the Bengal Government in its possession and how were they being used? We agree with Pandit Kunzru that there is not the slightest justification for the rising level of prices of foodgrains in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal with all the supplies said to have been made available from day to day to the Bengal Government at the instance or under the authority of the Government of India. Curiously enough, neither Major-General Wood nor Sir Jawala Prasad Srivastava attempted any answer to these questions. This kind of shillyshallying will not do, this sickening hide-and-seek game. The Government of India must face the responsibilities; and if the Government of Bengal is not behaving properly, it is time there was ruthless intervention by the Centre.

CHAPTER IV

NO MERE CIVIL PROBLEM

Famine conditions of 1770 are already upon us. Despite the relief operations and the Vagrants' Home cases of death from starvation on Calcutta's streets continue to mount alarmingly. From Sunday night till Tuesday morning 127 such cases were removed to the hospitals and 14 deaths occurred. What is happening in the "city of palaces" is only an index of far more terrible things that are being witnessed in rural Bengal. In Calcutta these cases get wide publicity ; in the rural areas the silence of death is matched by that of the people around. In the Legislative Assembly insistent demands were made by members to have enquiries into such cases instituted. Sir Azizul Haque, who was then the Food Member, expressed the pious hope that enquiries would be made by the Provincial Government. But the Bengal Ministry has apparently thought discretion to be the better part of valour. It is not only silent as to cases of death from starvation but also as to what, if anything, is being done to afford relief. What relief could it afford ? Reports have reached us that in many places rice cannot be had either for love or for money. And where it is obtainable the ruling price is Rs. 40/- a

maund. The Bengali Agriculturist gets a higher price than usual for what he produces, but he produces little, and the price he gets does not enable him to buy essential commodities at the prices they are selling. Calcutta is not Bengal, and the few people whose family income has gone up for the war constitute an infinitesimal fraction of the population. As Mr. K. C. Neogy recalled in his food speech in the Assembly, the East India Company's servants made the same blunder with the consequence that the famine of 1770 wiped out one-third of the population of the province.

There has been much beating about the bush regarding the cause or causes of this appalling distress. Authority started by making the hoarder the villain of the piece. A drive was made against him first in rural Bengal and a considerable time after, Calcutta and Howrah were rounded up. The Minister admitted sorrowfully later on that not much hoarding was discovered in the country; on the contrary a serious shortage had come to light. The result of the drive in Calcutta and Howrah has not yet been published. Had anything but the proverbial "horse's egg" been discovered, the Ministry would have proclaimed that fact from the housetop. But facts have been telling their own tale. Some of the relief centres have had to be closed down because the supply promised by the Government had stopped. Not to speak of rice even the supply of *atta* has been stopped. Mills and factories which used to supply cheaper rations to their employees have either stopped the supply alto-

gether or reduced it very considerably. Their excuse is that they have been unable to get supplies. Mr. Suhrawardy has issued the solemn warning, "Worse days are ahead ; the months of September, October and November will be even more critical." Does he think he has done his duty by telling his countrymen that the Provincial Government is helpless in view of the alleged failure of the Government of India to keep its promise in regard to the quantity of food to be supplied to Bengal ? We are told that some rice is coming from the Punjab. The quantity stated is too small to make an appreciable change in the situation. Mr. Suhrawardy admitted so much when the other day he said in a public speech, in reference to a direct question put by us, that he was not in a position to give the assurance that the price of rice and other foodgrains would come down ; all that he could say was that "he would try". We wonder what makes the Ministers stick to their jobs if they are so helpless !

Major-General Wood was possibly a misfit in the Food Department. He has gone to the Munitions, a more appropriate place for him. Almost to the very last he gave us long speeches when bread was wanted, "Train-load after train-load of rice," he declared not long ago, "is coming into Calcutta. There will be 15,000 tons of wheat alone in Calcutta by to-night since last Sunday. And we will go on doing it. We will go on pouring rice and wheat and everything else into Calcutta until we knock the nonsense out of the

Rs. 25/- a maund." The "nonsense" of Rs. 25/- a maund has risen to the madness of Rs. 40/- in the city for all the pouring of words, words and words from the Major-General.

This supposed-to-be super-efficient bureaucracy has bungled things in a manner that would have cost any Government in the world its life. Providentially India is not in the thick of the war and Bengal has had a spell of respite, from the Japanese bombs. What would have happened otherwise can be more easily imagined than described. What use has the Government been making of this period of grace—how long it will last nobody knows—to save the millions who are starving? Various suggestions have been made. As an important measure it has been urged that ships carrying wheat, from Australia and rice from some of the South American countries should be immediately requisitioned. Sir Azizul Haque expressed himself as sympathetic to the suggestion, but hummed and hawed, "What about the shipping difficulties?" Shipping difficulties did not stand in the way of Great Britain (which unlike India depends almost entirely for her food supply on other countries) importing huge quantities of food even in the worst days of the U-boat menace. The United Kingdom Commercial Corporation has, according to its Chairman, supplied by sea to Russia and the Middle East huge quantities of food and other essential require-

ments from India. Even now, early this month, the Government of India found no difficulty in exporting rice from Bengal to South Africa. It is only when food has to be imported for India from foreign countries that we hear of the shipping difficulties; and this at time when the Mediterranean is free from the Axis menace and the Atlantic has seen many U-boats sent to its bottom.

Bengal and Assam are supposed to be the eastern bastion of India's defence and a jumping-off ground for an offensive. To put the matter no higher, is it good military strategy to allow confusion to prevail among the civil population which is in the throes of a deadly famine? What is true of Bengal and Assam is also true more or less in regard to Orissa, Madras and Travancore. Munitions, we believe, would have been rushed had Eastern India been invaded by the enemy. Shipping difficulties would not have stood in the way. Japanese bombing has inflicted far less casualties than the toll famine has been taking. The problem is as much military as it is civil.

CHAPTER V.

CALCUTTA'S DILEMMA

The Bengal Ministry has at last broken its silence in regard to its responsibility for deaths due to starvation. A Bengal Government Press Note says: "Information regarding the admission of collapsed persons to Campbell Hospital or Behala Emergency Hospital or their progress after admission may be had on enquiry at any Post-raid Information centre". So the casualties for starvation are proposed to be treated on the basis as if caused by enemy bombs. The Note further assumes that the starving persons, like those injured or killed by bombs, have relatives who may be disposed to enquire about their location, treatment and progress. It is gratifying to note that the Post-raid Information centres have at last been brought into some use. The organisations in connection with air-raids have cost the public exchequer a mint of money. If we have no enemy raids for a pretty long time we have casualties in the shape of deaths from starvation in as great a number as we might expect from intensive day to day enemy air raids. On Tuesday 81 starving persons were picked up from the streets of Calcutta. Next day the figure rose to 91. The last three days' total comes to 213.

The deaths among them numbered over 20, the majority being women and children. They are between the ages of 60 and 2.

But not a mouse stirs in London or Washington or even Quebec where the post-North African Allied Grand Strategy is being evolved. Perhaps they do not know. Deaths from starvation, in how great a number they may take place, are not news. It is not the case of a man biting a dog. It is a dog biting a man. And the United Nations know, however they might be taught the contrary, that most Indians live on the border of starvation. But is death or injury from bombing more painful or tragic than death or dereliction from starvation? As a matter of fact, society suffers far more from the latter than from the former cause. Bombing may demolish houses, but hunger breaks the family and the society. We have report of children singly or together roaming about the streets in search of food. A child here or there, dead or dying from starvation has been removed from the pavements. Had the child parents? Perhaps a heart-rending story will be unfolded if an enquiry were instituted. What hunger can do to break the most sacred and loving ties well-fed people cannot imagine. Many of the people who have come to Calcutta in search of food and whom the police could not *chalan* either as vagrants or treat as beggars—for not all of them beg—had their homes in villages not far away from the city. They have probably sold their belongings

to buy or procure food. When nothing was left the instinct of self-preservation prevailed or the inability to bear the sight of wife and children starving made the men-folk desert them. The women did likewise having waited some time longer or taking the children including sucking babes, left for the city of Calcutta on which perhaps they had never set foot before but whose reputation for wealth and charity they had heard.

To judge from the numberless relief organisations and the "free kitchens" Calcutta has not belied its reputation. It has given food to many but shelter to very few. It has been ascertained from the derelict persons removed to the temporary hospitals that they had no morsel of food for days. Has anybody cared to ascertain why? Perhaps they had known better days and their self-respect would not permit them either to beg or scramble for food at the relief centres. Perhaps some of them did not know where the relief centres were. The self-respecting among them had perhaps a few small coins when they came to the city and having exhausted them calmly laid themselves down on the pavements to die. Not a few of them might have found the pickings from the dustbins more probable than begging. And one need not be surprised at the statement of Calcutta's Health Officer that "15 to 25 per cent of cholera cases are reported from amongst the people picked up from the streets and this untimely prevalence of the cholera epidemic is due to the serious insanitary condition

created by them." He warns that "unless some suitable measures are adopted immediately to minimise the nuisances created by thousands of people coming to Calcutta for gruel from free kitchens in the city there is every chance of a serious outbreak of epidemic diseases in the near future." He advises that "the resources of the charitable public in feeding these people should be pooled and these free kitchens should be taken to the outskirts of Calcutta."

We have our sympathy for these views of the Health Officer. The sight of derelict people lying on the pavements, of bodies removed, thousands of ill-clad insanitary people being fed on the streets, offends the eye; and after all Calcutta is for the well-to-do people and contains at the present moment many whose services are important for the country. Their health cannot but be a concern to the Health Officer. But at the present moment the heart of a Calcutta citizen is rent by sentiment on one side and self interest on the other: "What will happen to these countrymen of ours if they are driven out? They are at least getting some food which they cannot have in their villages. The more sentimental among them perhaps say: "If these poor people die let Calcutta die with them." Of course Calcutta's Health Officer is paid to look after the health of the city; he cannot look forward to that prospect with complacency.

Calcutta could be easy in her conscience could she be assured that Bengal was being taken care of

by the Ministry masquerading as Government. The relief agencies, all non-official, in the rest of Bengal, are few. Who will organise social service on the gigantic scale necessary? The Congress has done it in the past and could do it again. The Moslem League has never cared for the suffering even of Moslem humanity. Social service does not figure in its programme. Its one concern is Pakistan and as things look, Bengal may turn out at this rate at no distant date to be something alike, e.g., *Gorosthan* (the graveyard). Lord Linlithgow will not set the Congress free even at this critical hour when his own Government has been condemned by friends and critics alike for its incompetence.

What will Calcutta do in this situation—seek safety for itself or continue to harbour distressed humanity in its bosom taking all risks?

CHAPTER VI.

ALL FOR POLITICAL ENDS !

Two most notable contributions to the discussions of the food situation in the country have been made during the week, one by Mr. Conran-Smith, Home Secretary to the Government of India, and the other by *The Times* of London representing, we suppose, British public opinion. The Home Secretary said in the course of a speech in India's Upper House, the Council of State, that the food situation in Bengal was being over-dramatized. *The Times* elaborated the thesis propounded some time back by our good Secretary of State, Mr. Amery, that the Indian food crisis was due to hoarding, and suggested another factor, which was transport difficulty due to the spirit of "provincial separatism" which had erected local barriers to the transport of foodstuffs "from Province to Province and district to district." The lead in over-dramatization was taken by our Calcutta Anglo-Indian contemporary the *Statesman* which, departing from the traditions of "sobriety" we have learnt to associate with British journalism in this country, published certain photographs of men, women and children dying or dead from starvation on the pavements of Calcutta, the second city in the British Empire. From long before that descriptions of what was taking

place daily in the city before the eyes of thousands had been appearing in the daily Press but did not create much of an impression on our gods at New Delhi or our super-gods in far distant England. After all the testimony of our countrymen has little value to our masters; even that of the white sojourners in this country, if it agrees with that of our people, has also been condemned or dismissed as tainted. Mr. Conran-Smith has now come forward to belittle the testimony of the photographs published by the *Statesman* as suffering from "over-dramatization." What that really means we do not know and Mr. Conran-Smith did not explain. Perhaps all that he wished to convey, is somewhat vaguely, was that the stories of multitudes suffering from starvation were to be discounted not because they were untrue, but because they went against the interests and good name, built by so much propaganda, of British rule in this country.

The Times is one of the great upholders of British Imperialism in India. It maintains an army of Conran-Smiths on its staff to bear that burden. It has, therefore, tried to make out a more plausible case by giving the airy nothing of over-dramatization a habitation and a name. It makes hoarding mainly responsible for the food situation in India which, it seems, can no longer be concealed from the world public. And who, according to it, are the hoarders? Not only large speculators but "countless small producers who perhaps for the first time in their life have found themselves well enough off

to choose their own time to sell and have become convinced by war-time experience that profits can be made by waiting." The ingenuity of the argument will convince anybody that the pen is mightier than the sword even to uphold an Empire. If people are really dying in their thousands in India from starvation, is the Administration to be blamed for it? Had anything like the scenes that are witnessed in the streets of Calcutta been enacted for one day in London, the Administration would have seen its last day. But Calcutta is not London. Here the administration, like the British King, can do no wrong and commit no mistake. So *The Times* makes scape-goats of the speculators and even small producers. Would not the British Government have made short work of the speculators had they, by their anti-social activities, brought about a situation in England that speculators, mostly Indian, are supposed to have brought about in India? But, says *The Times* "Coercion, even if it were fair or practicable, would hardly avail". Apparently *The Times* wishes to convey that coercion is a thing which is alien to the British Government as it operates in India. And it doubts that coercion in a case like this is either "fair" or "practicable". Why not "fair"? Is it because India under the aegis of British rule is a land of fair dealings, something like a second heaven? Why not practicable? Is it because the speculators are valuable allies and there is a British element among them? That the "small producers" hardly produce enough to hold on to have a

better price is a fact which cannot be unknown to the Conran-Smiths of *The Times* but that fact must be ignored to bolster up a thesis based on rank hypocrisy. Does not *The Times* know that jute, which is Bengal's monopoly, has never fetched a fair price because of the inability of the producer to hold on, and which fact, again, enables the jute mill interests to make fabulous profits ?

We have seen what an awful muddle of transport has been made by the Transport Department of the Central Government which is presided over by a Britisher. The "provincial barriers" have nothing to do with it. Wagons go to wrong places and miss the right ones with the result that huge quantities of food-stuffs, which would otherwise be available to Bengal, remain in the Punjab or rot in Sind. This fact has got to be concealed otherwise the theory that everything is to be blamed but the Administration cannot be bolstered up.

As if all these series of suppression of fact and suggestion of falsehood are not enough. *The Times* concludes by harping on the "political and religious animosities" in India which, it "hopes" with a sanctimoniousness hard to beat, will tend to disappear in the common endeavour to understand "complicated questions of production and distribution, of supply and rationing of taxation and savings."

Mr. Conran-Smith condemns what he calls the exploitation of the food situation for political end. How would he like his own "end" and that of *The Times* to be described?

CHAPTER VII.

HOW LONG ?

Some of the vagrants are professional beggars. Day in and day out they roam about begging for morsels or cash and singing their pathetic music, adjusted by blood-suckers behind the screen to the requirements of the situation, and making their offerings after a hard day's toil at the altar of greed. But the vast majority of them appear to have migrated from the agricultural areas, having abandoned their land and all they could claim their own in despair and panic. To the extent that these men have been uprooted from the soil by the impact of this terrible phase of social wrong, it gives rise to a problem which is fraught with perils to the immediate or distant future. Charities can keep them going for some time, but they cannot reach down to the roots of this maladjustment. Then there is another disquieting symptom of the disease. That there is scarcity of food-grains is admitted on all hands. What the causes are we need not discuss. That fact is taken for granted in all quarters. It is too obvious and terrible a fact. Is that all? All the indications are that supply is short relatively to demand and, that the supply has been stained by underground activities or other

artificial devices. Those who have enough money and to spare can buy enough food-grains. They feel no distress. They suffer from no shortage. They eat and drink and waste as if nothing has happened. This is confirmed by the report that there have been sudden withdrawals of rice from the market since the promulgation of the Price Control Order and that there has been no improvement in the situation despite Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy's stern warning to the rice dealers.

At one end there is increasing prosperity ; at the other end there is starvation. At one end the law-giver issues his *firmans* ; at the other end there is open and calculated defiance of law and authority. All this has been going on for months and to-day the spectre of a social catalysm haunts all men of goodwill. Relief is no answer. Charities offer no solution. There is need for immediate and drastic transformation of social relations. The need is for the radical adjustment of money incomes and equitable distribution of the available resources of the community among its different classes. The hungry millions must be saved not only from starvation but also from the shame and humiliation of charity doles. The top men in the social scale must not be allowed to enjoy their prosperity windfall at the expense of the community and then, by judicious distribution of charities out of their ill-gotten gains, divert public attention from the fundamental issue of the social conflict. Let us profit from the lessons of history

During 1926-27, to cite an analogous case, the *kulaks* in Russia, brought food-grains from the poor and middle class peasants after the harvest. Instead of selling them to the State buying organs they held them until the end of the agricultural year in anticipation of scarcity forcing up prices. The deficiency of purchases by the State buying organs at the harvest time emphasised the urgency of adequate supplies in the spring and threatened to force prices up to famine levels. Even poor peasants were compelled to buy back from the *kulaks* at inflated prices: what they had sold to them in the previous autumn. In the second half of 1926 the Soviet Government decided to break this *kulak* corner. They prohibited private trading in foodgrains and ruthlessly controlled purchase prices offered by the buying organs. This drastic action produced gratifying results. During 1927-28, however, there was a *kulak* rally in defiance of the Socialist State. It was promptly met by complete suppression of the *kulaks* and the situation was brought under control. Substitute profiteers and speculators for the *kulaks* and you get the Indian situation in a nutshell.

But the Government as at present *constituted in this country has disastrously failed*. It has no food policy during the last three or four years. It has not stopped exports out of India. It has not adjusted the army purchases to the civilian requirements. It has not eliminated waste. What is more, it has not dealt with the anti-social elements in the appropriate manner. It

has failed both at the Centre and in the Provinces. It has failed with or without Ministers. There is no decency in the organised life of the community. Opportunists, careerists, reactionaries and profiteers all seem to have conspired. There must be a clean sweep of these dangerous elements. Democracy must assert itself. There must be freedom from want and from fear. And we believe that this vast, fair and fertile land with its expansive green fields, flowing rivers and Nature's bounteous plenty can sustain its population with food. All that is needed is pooling and distribution. The greatest saboteurs in this world conflict are men who, occupying as they do seats of power and authority, continue to abuse their power and misuse their authority and spread, by their mischievous bungling and congenital inefficiency, distress and suffering throughout this potentially rich and prosperous land. These men and their allies must be tracked down and tarred and feathered and exhibited in public streets as an example and a warning.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HUSH-HUSH POLICY

The Ministry has miserably failed not only in taking the public into confidence, but also in the administration of relief. In the City of Calcutta where, according to official estimates, not less than a lakh of people have made the pavements their dwelling place, the Ministry has been unable to provide shelter for them. We have repeatedly urged upon the Government to utilise the 13 air-raid posts, each with a capacity to accommodate from four to five hundred people, but so far only two such posts have been so utilised. Exposure is almost as responsible as starvation for the deaths that occur every day on the streets and the pestilence that the starvation cases is spreading in the city. We have suggested the temporary erection of huts on the outskirts of the city for the accommodation of these hapless people. Accommodation has been provided for only 1,000, besides the cases removed to hospitals either to die or to be discharged after a few days; and this, again, is to be a sort of clearing house from where the people will be removed to various evacuee camps round Calcutta. From these camps the people will be repatriated to their villages where arrangements may be made to feed them

“through a network of gruel kitchens.” The Minister does not say when he expects this “network” to be completed. We have received no report that the work has even been started anywhere. If the Ministers know, they should announce the names of the places where arrangements for feeding the people have been made. The Ministers have till now indulged in tall talks. There has been a great hiatus between their words and deeds. The public, we must frankly say, are not very optimistic. But till then what are the arrangements proposed to be made to house the starving people? Their number swells every day. They have swarmed the city. Despite the tall talk in which Minister Mr. Sahabuddin indulged in New Delhi the other day about the far larger number of people being fed in Government gruel kitchens, it is private charity that has been doing the major part of the work of relief. The mortality among the infants has been most appalling. *Khichuri* or *gruel* is no food for them. Private charity has organised milk canteens, but these are a few regard being had to the requirements. What has the Ministry done in the matter? Milk is selling at Calcutta at two seers or even less for the rupee. Has the Ministry lifted its little finger to get supplies of milk from outside?

It is useless to catalogue the acts of omission, not to speak of those of commission, of the Ministry. It has taken no initiative. It has been subjected, to constant prodding to which it has responded if at all, feebly and in a very half-hearted manner.

CHAPTER IX.

HOMICIDAL CALLOUSNESS

Sir Jagdish Prasad, an ex-Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, has in the course of a statement administered a stern rebuke to those supermen of New Delhi who like Mr Conran-Smith have detected nothing but "over-dramatisation" in harrowing accounts of starvation and deaths in the streets of Calcutta and all parts of Bengal that have appeared from time to time. Newspaper reports would not convince them. Photographs of dead, dying and emaciated men, women and children would make no impression on their minds. They would reconcile themselves to their idiotic but provocative self-complacence amidst the colourful splendour of New Delhi's *musnad* brought up to date by the architects of India's destiny. Lest the Britons at home should be scandalised by the achievements of British rule as depicted in these accounts, steps have been taken to prevent foreign newspaper correspondents assigned to his country from cabling abroad even the bare facts of deaths and hospital admissions due to starvation issued in Calcutta under the authority of the Bengal Government. All this is disgraceful, but the gods of New Delhi exult in their pride, their homicidal callousness and their

own class consciousness in the face of an acute crisis in Bengal. Sir Jagdish Prasad has called upon these supermen to make a move and descend upon the Gangetic Delta which has now been reduced to a vast scene of devastation and human wreckage. It is doubtful whether they would oblige Sir Jagdish Prasad and take measure of their much-boosted efficiency and tenderness for the suffering and hardships of the children of the soil. From such men one expects no help and no initiative in social healing to alleviate human distress, not even words of sympathy.

But we venture to address a few words to His Excellency Sir Thomas Rutherford, Bengal's acting Governor. We are not aware of his antecedents, except that he is a senior and distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service. But we have it from men who have had contact with him that he is a man of drive, of imagination and of courage. His Excellency is on trial. Never before in living memory has any Governor been confronted with a situation so critical and perilous. During the last few days important suggestions have been made in responsible quarters and commended to His Excellency's consideration. Some of them have been embodied in a joint statement issued by Sir Nripendra Nath Sircar and Sir Jagdish Prasad. These were followed by an open letter addressed to His Excellency by Dr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee. In a separate statement just released Sir Jagdish Prasad has pursued the matter in

greater detail. All these proposals, we hope, will receive at the Governor's hands the attention they deserve. We would just like to refer to one or two points. Is there any scarcity of foodgrains in Bengal? Or is the shortage so great that by no device could the present alarming food anarchy be brought under control? The Ministry in Bengal has stated more than once that the "denial" rice had practically nothing to do with the crisis. Almost the whole quantity of rice purchased by the Bengal Government in pursuance of the denial policy, it is claimed, has been re-sold through controlled shops. The Government of India has stated that the exports out of this country during the last year constituted a very small fraction of the country's production. Purchases of foodgrains for Army requirements are, we are told, controlled by the Central Government's Food Department. They form, it is pointed out, an insignificant percentage of the normal civilian requirements. The cessation of imports of Rangoon rice on account of the Japanese occupation of Burma accounts for a shortage which is in the neighbourhood of between 3 and 4 per cent of Bengal's average normal production.

If the figures cited by the Central Government and the Provincial Government are correct, then the supplies have been affected only to the extent of about 5 per cent, maybe even less. A considerable section of the people during these eight or nine months have been ill-fed, half-fed or un-fed, thereby releasing from normal

consumption large quantity of foodgrains. In other words, according to these statistical calculations the shortage due to the factors previously mentioned has been more than compensated for by chronic starvation during this period and deaths occurring daily in urban and rural area on account of undernourishment or starvation. Either the Government figures are correct or they are not. If they are correct, His Excellency would do well in setting in motion the entire State machinery not only to disgorge the stocks but to make an example in a ruthless manner of the guilty ones for their criminal activities. There must be no respect for privilege. There must be no slavish adherence to the so-called rules of propriety or conventional ethics. No quarter must be shown to those who exploit human misery and suck the blood of their fellow-men. If, on the contrary, the figures published by the Government are not correct, then those responsible must be immediately brought to book. They have misled the country. They have deceived the Government. They have brought about this mischievous jugglery of figures.

We repeat that Sir Thomas Rutherford is faced with a tremendous crisis and that for its speedy and effective solution he will have to harness to his task an energy of mind and of physique and a revolutionary social outlook which have been sadly lacking in the Administration of Bengal during a most tragic period of her chequered history.

CHAPTER X.

ROTTEN TO THE CORE.

There is piteous cry from all sides—in the Empire's City of Palaces, along the long and fertile coast-line of Bengal and in the districts which fed not only their own people but the non-producing areas! Is all this the legacy of Mr. Fazlul Huq and his colleagues? If so, how? Ministers of the Crown must at least be honest. If they can rule the Province properly, let them do so by all means. If, as is clear, the issue is too big for these mighty little Muslim League *Gauleiters* with little or no brains, they have no business to remain where they are, abuse the powers they enjoy, and subject the people of this Province to endless privations and intolerable sufferings.

During the regime of the last Ministry there was no stir in other Provinces and the States. The moral conscience of the Government of India was not shaken. We do not say that all the aid that Bengal needs has been given by New Delhi. But surely considerable relief has come largely through the co-operation of the surplus areas or regions. Add to these imports the yield from the *aus* crop which is already in the market and the stocks with the Government and employers of industrial

labour of last year's crop. We repeat that the available foodgrains, if properly distributed, are just sufficient to feed Bengal for at least three months or until the *aman* crop is harvested in December. These may be placed at the disposal of the consuming public at prices within their means. No scarcity song will do at the present moment, no plea of shortage. For the limited period there is no shortage and absolutely no scarcity. It is a problem of control and distribution. It is a problem of putting the house in order. It is a problem of fighting ruthlessly the profiteers and the hoarders both inside the Administration and outside. We say once again that the Ministry is either inefficient or corrupt. Does it not know the exact figures of daily imports from outside the Province? Is it in the dark as to the stocks lying with the Government and its selling and distributing agents? Has it no idea as to the approximate yield of the *aus* crop? It knows all these and more; and there's the rub. Where do these foodgrains go? Who buys, controls and distributes them, and on what terms and under what conditions?

The mishandling of the situation, the dangerous bungling and the alarming deterioration in the state of things give ample grounds for suspicion as to the conduct of the Ministry and the administration of the Department of Civil Supplies. There is absolutely no reason why a single person should die of starvation with the resources now at Bengal's command. That the death-roll is

mounting is clear evidence of the fact that the whole machinery is rotten. It is evidence either of rank corruption or of criminal neglect of the primary responsibility of the Government. Once more we invite His Excellency Sir Thomas Rutherford to call upon his Ministers to quit and take over in his own discretion. We invite Lord Linlithgow before he leaves India to try his hand at one progressive and popular deal for the sake of the starving people of Bengal. The Ministry is a thoroughly unreliable lot ; its own deeds or misdeeds have proved it beyond any shadow of doubt. The Bengal Legislature is a discredited rump out of contact with the people and callously indifferent to the widespread misery and starvation. This rotten machinery must go. Bengal cannot be saved unless it is made to go.

CHAPTER XI.

WHOSE IS THE RESPONSIBILITY ?

We agree with our Calcutta Anglo-Indian contemporary *The Statesman* that "under the present system of government, responsibility for breakdown inescapably rests in the last resort upon Authority in Britain and its immediate representatives here." It recalls how the bureaucracy here has perfected the machinery of law and order but has miserably failed in the quality of foresight though it had received warning after warning of the coming disaster of a famine. It is not denied that there are intelligent men in the service and not all of them wanting in sympathy for the people. Our contemporary is right in fixing the responsibility where it should really rest, but has failed to go deeper so as to reach the root cause of the breakdown at a moment of economic crisis. It is not so much the man as the system. We have the farce of a provincial autonomy but power rests, as it has always rested, in British hands. We have seen how the constitution, instead of furthering the cause of democracy, has created divisions and more divisions among the people with the result that British rule has entrenched itself more firmly than ever on the soil. Thus, to take an instance or two, the con-

stitution did not prevent the Governor of Sind, at the instance of the Viceroy, from dismissing a Ministry that had a majority in the Legislature. It did not prevent a Governor of Bengal from doing likewise. And the same constitution is now being made to serve the purpose of bolstering up a Ministry that has miserably failed to conduct itself as an honest or efficient administration on the pretext that it has a majority in the Legislature. Ministries everywhere have seen that they are nominally responsible to the Legislature but really to the Governor, the provincial representative of the British Government. Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin found his trump card in the fact that the political prisoners he was being asked to release had been put where they are by his predecessors in office. He knows, as much as his predecessors did, that the real authority to put thousands of persons in jail without the semblance of a trial and without even the formalities required by a lawless law was not the Ministry but the Governor and the permanent officials and the police. Why did not that Ministry resign? Why does not the present Ministry resign? The former knew, as the latter knows, where power really rested. That makes the present Ministries so different from the Congress Ministries. Not that every Congress Minister was an embodiment of fearlessness and above the temptation of office, but the Congress, as an organisation, stood for national service. Many of its leaders and of its rank and file had to their credit distinguished social service. When the Congress agreed to work the con-

stitution, full of defects as it was, it secured for the Ministers a greater freedom than was apparently contemplated in the constitution. To ensure that the Ministries entered their new sphere of duty in the spirit of service and that none fell a prey to the temptations of the job, the Congress enjoined that the salary of a Minister would not be more than Rs. 500/- a month. If the Congress Ministries proved so great a success it was not because they had brought administrative experience, which many of them lacked, but because they had genuine sympathy for their countrymen in whose cause they had suffered privations and incarcerations and also because they had sincerely accepted responsibility to the people and none else. Thus when the time came it was easy for them to give up their Commission.

Why has there been no breakdown in the supply and distribution of food in the homeland of Englishmen? How to explain that the British Government had the foresight which the Government of India lacked? Are the agents of the British authority in this country less intelligent than their principals? Does a Britisher shed his humanity directly he crosses the Suez Canal to come over to India? These things do not and cannot happen. The explanation is simple. It is human nature that one should have greater sympathy for one's own countrymen than for non-nationals. The non-national personnel of the Indian Government is part of the explanation of the breakdown in a crisis calling for a wide measure of

sympathy. But the contrast is to be largely accounted for by the system of government in the two countries. The British Ministers and their officials know that they are responsible for their deeds and misdeeds to the people and that responsibility can be enforced in case of grave dereliction of duty by very drastic action. Besides Parliament, public opinion is a great force. In Britain the Government is of the people, by the people and for the people. In India, the Government is not of the people nor by the people, and despite the white-washing effort of India's ex-Viceroy, the "armless Mahatma", in his new role as Britain's Propaganda Chief in the U.S.A., it can be safely asserted that it has not always been "for the people". A British official may be quite sympathetic to the people, but he has to conform to the requirements of a cast-iron machine. He cannot even freely express his feelings in a private letter to his wife or a friend in England. If he does so, he will have to resign or retire like Mr. Blair.

The disaster that has overtaken this country, one may assert, could not have happened had power, in the Centre and in the Provinces, rested in the hands of governments responsible to the people. British Ministers are not supermen. They are responsible and it is responsibility to the people that really matters.

British rule for about two centuries would have proved a miserable failure had it not produce a sufficient number of Indians to run the administration in British

interest and to faithfully carry out the policies laid down for them. They are required by a share of the spoils and some of them have the pleasure of exercising authority over their countrymen though in borrowed plumes. Directly on entering office, the League Ministry in Bengal appointed as the sole purchasing agent for foodstuffs to the Government a person closely associated with the Ministry in politics. Had the British Ministry behaved in that way Parliament would have waited for no proof of actual dishonesty, but sent the Ministry about its business forthwith. But in Bengal a Governor connived at it, even though a High Court Judge put to the job of Civil Supplies felt compelled to resign for reasons the Ministry has refused to disclose questions in the Legislature and the demand of the public.

Can it be supposed for one moment that the British Parliament or the public would have tolerated a Ministry that had refused to answer pertinent questions relating to the handling of the food situation as the Bengal Ministry has done, particularly when thousands of people are dying of starvation? As we have pointed out more than once, the real cause of the breakdown is the political system, and the responsibility in the last resort is of the British Government, the British Parliament and the British people.

CHAPTER XII.

THOSE BITTER LESSONS

But as the Hon'ble Sir J. P. Srivastava points out the local resources must be properly handled and mobilised. On this score the Ministry has been charged not merely by the Opposition in Bengal but by Ministers of the Punjab on whose supplies at fair and reasonable prices we count so much. All this is known to the European group. Perhaps much more than this has been brought to its notice. But the Ministry is loyal and devoted. It does not matter whether it is corrupt or inefficient. So it must be kept at the job while millions starve and tens of thousands die. The Ministry has won. The Legislature stands prorogued. The food anarchy assumes alarming proportions. The stockist sits tight upon his stocks. The hoarder thrives on the misery of his fellowmen. The profiteer makes his pile out of the black market. Rice has disappeared. Wheat and wheat products do not reach their destinations. What does Bengal think of her responsible Ministers and elected Legislature? What does the rest of India think of Bengal? What does the world think of the white man's burden or the white man's black agents charged with the responsibilities of administration?

The Ministry has forfeited by its own misdeeds its title to public confidence. The Legislative Chambers have become the dumping ground for opportunists, reactionaries and careerists. And yet the Ministers and legislators flourish in a province where a maund of rice has become more precious than human life. How long will this go on—the Ministerial misrule, the lawgiver's sordid acquiescence and the profiteer's *raj*? Is it the beginning of the end? Where is Bengal drifting?

We are reminded of a distressing episode that took place in another part of the world more than twenty-five years ago. It was in the beginning of the year 1917. The tragic drama was enacted in Tsarist Russia. The story has been told in a book called '*A History of the Great War 1914—18*' by Mr. C. R. M. F. Cruttwell, a great scholar at Oxford. We could cite other authorities, but to the Anglo-Saxon mind this Oxford Master's account is likely to make an immediate appeal not merely by his dispassionate and scientific approach but for certain other considerations. This is what he writes :

The winter was now far spent, and the extreme cold had passed. Though supplies had been badly organised in the great towns and long food queues had been standing almost daily in the snow, there had been no serious riot or disturbance for over two months. It may be that the revolutionaries who polluted in the capital held their hand until

the Duma had at last assembled at the end of February. At the beginning of March the problem of supplying Petrograd with food became more acute. The exceptionally heavy snowfalls of the winter had damaged or blocked many railway engines and trucks, and had resulted in a great shortage of fuel. The goods traffic, therefore for the first fortnight of the month was by order practically restricted to coal. As a result, hardly any wheaten flour was to be found in the capital, though there were considerable quantities of rye. This scarcity was increased by bad arrangements for distribution and by shopkeepers holding up their supplies for a higher price. Sporadic riots began on March 8th, with sacking of bakers' shops. Yet so little attention was directed towards them that Nicholas left that day for G. H. Q.

There were three months of patient waiting. The famished people cried for food in vain. There was mismanagement and maladministration. The capital was about to burn. The great Czar made a stately move to the General Headquarters. There was nothing doing. And then ?

On the 11th, however, the Government set to work in earnest to clear the streets. The police appeared in large numbers, some of whom directed fire upon the crowd from the housetops. But the enormous garrison of the city, some 190,000 strong, including

many units of the pampered Imperial Guard, not only refused to fire on the people but began to go over to their side.

The story does not end there. It was just the beginning. And then ?

On the 12th a revolution was in full swing, accompanied by all the traditional and symbolic signs of popular victory. The Winter Palace was invaded, public buildings were burnt, the prisons were entered—in particular the Russian Bastille, the notorious fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul—and their inmates released.

We reproduce the story not in anger but in sorrow. We reproduce it to sound a note of solemn warning to those who are playing with the lives of millions of Bengal's citizens, the exploited and impoverished children of the soil, who toil to starve to death and who by the sweat of their brow give the food which find its way in a mysterious manner into the bottomless pit.

It is our earnest hope that from no quarter should there be encouragement to lawlessness which sometimes acts as a boomerang. But the law-giver must learn to profit by the lessons of history. There is something called the inexorable operation of the social forces which neither the law nor the law-giver can resist. We have in our midst the entire Russian setting—the appalling distress and misery, the law's delay and the law-giver's bungling, the profiteer's greed and the conspiracy of food sabotage, the rampant corruption and its exacting

toll of precious human life. The Bengal Duma was in session. In place of the Russian snowfalls the Damodar floods did the trick with railways and their trucks. There has also been rough handling of starving men and assault on a procession of hunger-marchers. Fortunately, however, contrary to Goebbels' wishful thinking, there has been no violent uprising. It may be due to the proverbial Oriental resignation to fate. It may be due to the fact that large sections of progressive opinion are persuaded that the issues involved in this war are fundamentally different from those of the last Great War and that nothing should be done to hamper, prejudice or undermine the prosecution of an anti-Fascist war. That the forces of lawlessness have not been let loose does not, however, reflect any credit on the Government. It has failed. What is more, it has mishandled the situation and allowed it to drift in a dangerous manner. Men of goodwill must come to the rescue. What we require to-day for a better and more efficient management of affairs is not a set of job-hunters, rice-brokers or profiteers in food-stuffs and corruptors of public morals but honest and determined men of imagination and courage who would dispense justice without fear and favour and deal with the wrong-doer in a swift, ruthless fashion.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NEED OF THE HOUR

The more one looks at the unplanned and whimsical manner in which the Bengal famine is being tackled the less one has hope of a relief of this mounting distress. Even in Calcutta which, being the focal centre of Bengal's trade and communications, is far better supplied with foodstuffs than the rest of the country the grip of famine is growing stronger, as is shown by the increase in the number of daily deaths. The figures published do not, of course, give the total number of deaths from starvation. Enterprise by the newspapers in the collection of death figures is discouraged. The only information allowed is of deaths in the hospitals, deaths on the streets being sought to be kept out of public knowledge. Whether it is done out of policy or whim it is not for us to say; but the inevitable impression on the public mind has been that it is done to soften a grim picture of widespread mortality in the very heart of the metropolis. It is because the truth seems too disconcertingly ugly to someone in a blacked-out office in Whitehall or someone lolling in the pampered luxury of New Delhi that the situation must be "under-dramatised" by all means? Or, is it because too many deaths would further emphasise the inefficiency of the present Ministry and the

worthlessness of the much-boasted relief measures undertaken by the Ministry in Calcutta that the true figure must be suppressed? These questions are on every lip. They press for an answer. But there will be none, for any answer will involve the Government in hopeless discredit.

If this is the cheerless situation in the city itself, where, authority is much more amply represented than in the countryside and where there is much greater scope for organisation of relief, how much more terrible are conditions in the mofussil! Reports from different districts show that in many widespread rural areas and municipal towns foodgrains have almost wholly disappeared. Of deaths from starvation there is no tally. There are difficulties in the collection of day-to-day statistics and the Government is not interested in the collection thereof apparently in an effort to avoid being truthful for fear that it may be accused of "over-dramatisation" by wire-pullers who act by remote control. The undeniable fact remains, however, that distress is already far more acute in urban areas in the mofussil than in Calcutta. These areas have to live on purchased food, which fact, viewed in the perspective of the very low standard of average income, precludes any possibility of hoarding by an over-whelming percentage of the inhabitants. Moreover, destitutes from the villages naturally flock to these areas in their desperate search for food. The tragic scenes being witnessed in Calcutta of dead and dying men, women and children

lying in rows on the sidewalks are being reproduced on a larger scale in the mofussil towns. They are all the more tragic because, unlike in Calcutta, there are smaller resources in the hands of relief workers. We agree with Dr. Syamaprosad Mookerjee's warning that unless foodgrains are quickly despatched to the mofussil during the next week or fortnight nothing can save Bengal. The plan he has proposed for immediate relief seems to us to be the only feasible one. In fact, it is the only plan that has come either from the Government or from outside the Government. It is a major constructive suggestion for which Mr. Suhrawardy had cried, some time ago. Let him take this up, work it and take the *kudos*. We trust Dr. Mookerjee will not mind.

Our experience of the relief efforts both by the Government and the public—the saddest spectacle in the province to-day is the existence of a public exclusive of the Government—has convinced us that it is not only supply but distribution that has been at fault. It is not a case of a sporadic meal or two or a week's outburst of charitable impulses that confronts the country. People have to be saved from death by immediate efforts that must be prolonged. Not everyone of Bengal's starving millions can be supplied free meals. There are those who are completely destitute. They form, however, the backbone of our agricultural economy. They constitute the manpower behind agricultural production which must be kept going at full steam. They, therefore, have to be saved if the province is to live on. They will

need free food, and in adequate quantities to keep them fit for their labour. Then there are those who are not completely destitute but who find it beyond their resources to purchase foodstuffs, even if they should be available, at the controlled prices not to speak of the actual prices at which they are available in the black market. But these unhappy people are no less valuable for the economic life of the province. They also have to be saved, and we see no other way for it that, to make food available to them at prices within their reach. Not only must foodstuffs reach them without delay but their prices must be considerably below the controlled prices as fixed at present. Every step must be taken to prevent relief foodgrains from making their way into the black market. Perhaps the best way to ensure fair distribution is to broadbase the Ministry on all parties in the Legislature so that it may acquire the goodwill and prestige it needs to be efficient. But since that means an end of the Muslim League Government, the people of Bengal would rather go on starving than be saved by an all-out ail-party effort.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER FAMINE, DISEASE .

In his recent broadcast Major-General Stuart gave an interesting account of the assistance rendered by the military so far in relieving distress in the famine-stricken areas. He said that there was no shortage of food in the majority of the famine areas except in a few isolated places which are difficult of access. Bengal's starving millions will be grateful for what the military people have done and are doing. As the Major-General said, there is likely to be greater friendliness between the Army and the people as a result of the former's humanitarian activities. One only regrets that all this has had to be done after thousands of people had already succumbed to starvation. As to whose the responsibility was, need we tell anything to the Major-General ?

But perhaps the main theme of Major-General Stuart's broadcast was the prevalence of diseases in the rural areas. Pestilence after famine or flood has been a common enough experience in this country, and the outbreak of diseases in a virulently epidemic form in several Bengal districts has only come in the natural course of things. This is what Major-General Stuart said : "Malnutrition, coupled with the advent of the cold weather and shortage of personal clothings and

blankets, has made a large percentage of the poorer classes easy victims to malaria, cholera and pneumonia which are rampant throughout a large number of districts." According to him, the most pressing problem of the moment was medical relief. He gave distressing details of the kind of distress prevailing in the villages as a result of the outbreak of diseases. Newspaper reports and responsible men who have toured the districts tell the same harrowing story. Thousands are dying of malaria, cholera, dysentery and pneumonia. Many more thousands will die if medical relief in an ample measure is not brought to them without delay. Famine has taken a very heavy toll of lives in Bengal. Those who have somehow managed to survive are in an incredibly poor state of health as a result of continued starvation. Their power of resisting diseases has been reduced almost to nil with the result that a mere attack of malaria or pneumonia kills them outright. What has been left undone by famine or starvation may now be done by pestilence. Major-General Stuart told us that aircraft had been pressed into service in rushing essential medical supplies to the districts and that the Army, in spite of its own heavy commitments, had so far provided in the affected districts 60 medical officers, 45 military detachments, a considerable number of mobile dispensaries and first-aid posts. This is quite good so far as it goes. But is it enough, regard being had to the immensity of the problem that faces all of us? Have the Government of Bengal any definite plan of medical relief

in the rural areas? If they have, will they make it public? The districts need abundant quantities of quinine at the moment. Will the authorities tell us how many pounds of quinine have been sent to the malaria-stricken districts? Are the people in the remote villages receiving their doses of quinine regularly? If not, what steps are being taken in the matter? Will it be very difficult to revive the old system of selling quinine at nominal prices through the post offices? Is it not likely to prove an effective way of making quinine available to the people in the far-off villages?

There was "one fact" in Major-General Stuart's broadcast which, we think, should not go unnoticed. He stated it "very frankly", and it was this, namely, that "the average peasant and the town-dweller were utterly callous to the sufferings of his fellow-brethren—man, woman, child. He sees so much distress around him, yet he seems entirely unwilling to render practical assistance or do anything to help." We are afraid the Major-General has not been quite fair to the people. Need we remind him that long before Government help in the matter of food relief could reach the villages, a number of non-official relief committees were formed in Calcutta and hundreds of volunteers went from this city to render relief to the famine-stricken? Was it not such relief organisations and relief workers who were probably the first to come to the rescue of the hurried and horror-stricken Indian evacuees from Burma in 1941-42? Assuming, however, that the people are callous to the

sufferings of others, will Major-General Stuart find fault with them? Have not poverty and pestilence, besides the occasional visitations of famines and floods, which have been their lot for decades past, completely deadened their senses and made them more dead than alive? To expect initiative and enterprise from people suffering from moral and material privations from reasons we need not explain to Major-General Stuart is to ask for too much.

CHAPTER XV

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY ?

With a bumper *aman* crop in sight and for certain other reasons the food situation in Bengal gave for a time, perceptible signs of steady improvement. In the Punjab the Administration have after weeks of controversy accepted, though not without reluctance, the Government of India's policy in regard to price control and rationing. Despite the Ministerial thunder of provincial autonomy in danger the Sind Government may soon follow suit. The position seems to be that, subject to local adjustments as different conditions in different provinces may warrant, a uniform food policy, both in its short-term and long-term aspects, would be followed throughout India. Where, however, a Provincial Government, whether under Ministerial regime or under Proclamation rule, ran to follow the all-India policy in actual practice the Central Government, it is understood, will not hesitate to resort to their emergency powers of direction, supervision and control. This, in brief, is the entire picture. Subject to this basic policy the Government of India have undertaken the responsibility of feeding Greater Calcutta and the foodgrains required for the purpose will be supplied from outside

the province. The areas other than Greater Calcutta will be left to local resources to be organised and pooled in accordance with a certain procedure for the purpose of ensuring equitable distribution as between deficit and surplus districts and stamping out the anti-social operations of the black market.

We had occasion several days ago to make observations on the projected scheme and offer some suggestions. We feel constrained to revert to the subject in view of reports of set-back in the general situation which we are daily receiving in Calcutta and from the districts. Once again rice and paddy are going into hoards. The steady fall in prices is not being maintained in many places. These are disquieting symptoms of a tendency which must be faced immediately and with determination. The Government announced long ago that Calcutta would be rationed. There is no knowing when rationing will begin. Hours lengthen into days and days into weeks and there is apparent disposition in authoritative quarters to seek for continuous postponement. To feed people constantly on promises and not to redeem them in time is a procedure which shakes faith and undermines *morale*. And yet, curiously enough, the Government to all appearances have become party to it with consequences which in common with the rest of the community they may soon have to regret. Will Greater Calcutta have rationed food and, if so, when and under whose management? It is reported that the Hon'ble Sir Jwala Prasad Srivastava, New Delhi's Food Member,

has already had discussions with the authorities in Bengal. What decisions have emerged from these conversations we do not know. But for very good reasons the public is getting impatient. After all, some authority must take the final responsibility, the Central Government or the Bengal Administration. In this crisis there is no room for divided counsels. The old scandal must not be repeated that when cornered the Bengal Government shifted the responsibility on to the shoulders of their predecessors or the Central Government and *vice versa*. And when this mutual mud-slinging proved to be of no effect whatsoever Mr. Leopold Amery dared bring down Providence from His seat of final judgment and make Him the villain of the piece. This must stop.

The Bengal Ministry cannot claim that they represent all sections of the people and inspire their confidence. The Government of India are an undiluted bureaucracy responsible to none but themselves and the Secretary of State who sees in the Indian scenes of devastation and desolation the hidden and sinister hand of a cruel Providence. All this is deplorable, but it is a stern fact which nobody in his senses would challenge. It is, therefore, urgent that an honest and earnest endeavour should be made by the authorities, both Central and Provincial, to seek for public co-operation not only in regard to policy but also in its execution from province to province and from district to district.

CHAPTER XVI

GIVE FOOD OR GET OUT

Bengal must feel grateful for the lead that is being given by the Punjab and the U. P. to come to her assistance in the distress the like of which has not been seen within living memory. The fund that is being opened by our Allahabad contemporary the *Leader* at the instance of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru is a move in the right direction. Bengal's need at the present moment is, however, not so much money as food; for in many parts of the province rice cannot be had even for money, and its price per maund ranges from Rs. 40 to Rs. 50. The Punjab can substantially help by offering to Bengal all her surplus wheat. There was a discussion in the Central Assembly the other day about the obstructive attitude of a certain Punjab Minister in regard to the supply of wheat from that province. Sir Chhotu Ram, for he is Minister concerned, has repudiated the charge and has alleged that the boot is on the other leg. He says that at the instance of the Central Government the Punjab Government had bought from the local market in the first week of July 218,654 tons of wheat but the Government of India had been able to remove only 62,000 tons of the huge amount, that is, only 28 per cent. And Sir Chhotu Ram exclaims: "What a sample of effi-

ciency" ! He need not be surprised ; for such efficiency has been in evidence in the Centre as well as in the Provinces where the bureaucracy is, as it always has been, in the saddle. This is in regard to efficiency. What about its allied virtue, integrity ? Sir Chhotu Ram gives some illuminating figures : "The Punjab wheat lands at Calcutta approximately at Rs. 12/8/- per maund. The Bengal Government sells it to the mills at Rs. 15/- per maund, allows Rs. 4/- per maund as milling charges, purchases *atta* from these very mills at Rs. 19/- per maund and sells at Rs. 20/- per maund !" Sir Chhotu Ram does not know the whole story. He thinks perhaps that *atta* is actually sold in the market at Rs. 20/- a maund. That is the controlled price with which the Ministry of Civil Supplies regales the public through the newspapers from time to time. The actual retail price of *atta* in Calcutta is 12 as. a seer, or Rs. 30 a maund or even more ! A private party can have any quantity of wheat milled at a lesser rate per maund than what the Government pays. Apparently it makes a profit at every stage ! Of course it does it through its agents some of whom are also agents for the purchase of rice. The Bengal Government is said to have justified this "astounding conduct" on the pretext that it has to send wheat and *atta* to distant stations and is also building a stabilization fund. "A stabilization fund at the expense of the Punjab grower and at the expense of the poor Bengal consumer" —sarcastically remarks the Punjab Minister. Sir Chhotu Ram's remarks about the "efficiency of the War Transport Department of the Central Government

and what looks dangerously like profiteering on the part of the Ministry of Civil Supplies, Bengal appeared in the Press a week ago. No contradiction has yet been forthcoming. The Punjab Premier, while issuing an appeal to the Punjab Zemindars, big or small, to place in the market such stocks of foodgrains as they can spare from their needs, has repeated the earlier charges of Sir Chhotu Ram in regard to the "amazing difference between delivery price of the Punjab wheat in Calcutta and the price of sale to the public." He hopes that the transport difficulties will be got over and "profiteering at the other end" will be stopped.

A similar allegation of profiteering was made not long ago in regard to the Sind Government. Obstructive attitude on the part of the Bihar Government also figured in the Central Assembly debate. The Central Government is, of course, helpless; for has not "Provincial Autonomy" ousted the jurisdiction of the Centre? Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru rightly points out that Provincial Autonomy has not stood in the way of the Central Government interfering in Provincial affairs "when it has considered it necessary to do so." It is only when millions of lives in a province are to be saved that the question of Provincial Autonomy rears its ugly head! It is said of Nero that he fiddled when Rome burnt. When large numbers of our people are dying of starvation we are being made to witness a series of apparently never-ending quarrels in which Ministers and Executive Councillors and officials are indulging! We would

respectfully ask all concerned to bury the hatchet and pool the resources at their disposal to save the starving millions. Let not the latter suffer for the sins of omission and commission on the part of this or that authority. We would request the Punjab Premier not to rest content by merely issuing an appeal to the Punjab Zemindars, but procure all available surplus and place it at the disposal of Bengal. The Hon'ble Member-in-charge of War Transport should tell the public whether all the Punjab wheat said to have been placed at the disposal of the Central Government from the first week of July has been sent to Bengal, and if he is in a position to arrange for quick transport if further supply is made available by that Government.

We have heard of some transactions in Australian wheat, how it was being brought to India and had to be sent back—a story that for its twilight deepens the mystery. But suggestions were made long ago to import rice from South America and apply to the International, British and Indian Red Cross Societies to get food for India from friendly and, if necessary, from enemy countries. We do not know why the Government should stand in need of prodding in a matter that concerns the lives of millions of His Majesty's Indian subjects. Why have they not appealed to the British Government and the Government of the U. S. A. ? Why have they not approached the Red Cross Societies ? The Viceroy's Cabinet is predominantly Indian. Are the

Indian members also afraid that an appeal to foreign countries and Red Cross organisations would go against the "Fifty Facts" and damage the prestige of their British masters? We know that they are not constitutionally responsible for their acts of omission and commission to their countrymen. But is not the occasion such when they should as Indians forget their differences and assert themselves as a real cabinet whose supreme duty is to save the situation by every means possible? If they cannot get food for their starving countrymen the only alternative left to them as men of honour would be to get out.

APPENDIX I

CATASTRAPHE OF UNPRECEDENTED NATURE

(1)

I was impressed everywhere with the gravity of the situation and the efforts made by philanthropic organisations to rescue people. Even in Calcutta, I have come across sights which would move any one with sympathy for his fellow beings. But the horrors I saw in Contai and Tamluk sub-divisions are well-nigh indescribable. I do not want to exaggerate, but I cannot help saying that Contai seemed to be a *city of the dead*. I came across dead bodies wherever I went. In the villages that I visited the position was even worse. I saw corpses lying about in Tamluk, Mahishadal and in every village which I could visit. I was credibly informed that both in Contai and Tamluk sub-divisions, jackals and dogs had been seen attacking people in whom life was not quite extinct.

The official view seems to be that deaths have occurred mostly among professional beggars. I cannot subscribe to this view. One must regard almost the entire population of Contai as consisting of professional beggars before one can accept. Again, we have been told on high authority that in 24-parganas and Midnapur districts rice was on sole practically in every 'hat' and

Observations of Pt. Hirday Nath Kanzru Member Council of State.

in petty grocers' shops. What I saw and the inquiries that I made compelled me to come to a different conclusion. Rice can be seen in small quantities in a few shops here and there, but it was not generally available. The poor people suffered, not merely because of high price of rice but also because of its absence.

When the whole province is affected, even the Government may be unable to afford full relief to the people, but the severity of the distress makes one feel strongly that the authorities did not realize the seriousness of the situation early enough and even when the terrible reality could not be ignored, the energetic measures demanded by the occasion were not taken. Non-official organisations in Calcutta and elsewhere have been rendering yeoman's service to the people.

(2)

There is incredible misery everywhere; starvation is the lot of the people, both in towns and villages, but the rural areas are more seriously affected than the urban areas. The sufferings of the villagers, particularly of women and children, bring tears to one's eyes. Desertion of wives by husbands and of children by their parents is increasing and smaller cultivators and landless labourers are selling their land and houses in order to have a few rupees to buy food with. There are shops in Narayangunj where one can see old corrugated tin sheets which cover the cottages of the village people, sold by starving villagers under the stress of a compelling neces-

sity. These people thus uprooted from their homes and without any resources migrate to the towns in search of food and flock to the gruel kitchens. This seems to me to disprove-effectively the charge of hoarding which has often been brought against the cultivator. It is cruel to charge starving villagers with deliberately withholding rice from the markets. I have seen rice on sale in village "hearths," but in very small quantities and its price was nowhere less than Rs. 50 per maund. It was much higher in towns. If the order fixing the price of rice, which has proved ineffective, is withdrawn, as it should be, some rice may yet find its way into the local markets. But I have been told, not merely by non-officials but also by such officials as have had an opportunity of discussing the matter with me, that there is no reason to suppose that its quantity will be appreciable.

Destitutes' homes have been started in several places, for instance, at Dacca, Chandpur and Narayangunj to which people who would otherwise live and die in the streets are removed and emergency hospitals have been opened for destitutes suffering from malaria, dysentery, diarrhoea and other diseases. Yet one comes across dead bodies and emaciated persons wherever one goes. A good proportion of the destitutes in the streets looked like walking corpses. It will be a miracle if they manage to live. The same thing may be said of those who are being looked after in the destitutes' homes and the emergency hospitals. Mr. Amery has denied in the House of

Commons that there is a shortage of medical supplies or a "widespread outbreak of disease". Whatever the source of his information, his statement is completely at variance with the facts. There is a great shortage of medical supplies. Quinine is almost not available and the people are falling a prey to all kinds of diseases on account of loss of vitality.

The gruel kitchens run by non-official agencies or by the authorities with the aid of money collected from the public are helpful, but their number is small. They have to be closed down from time to time for want of foodstuffs and the 'khichari' given per head is, as a rule, about 2 or $2\frac{1}{2}$ chattacks only, notwithstanding the decision of the Government, as announced in a Press Note dated October 13, 1943, that the scale of foodgrains for preparation of 'khichari' should be immediately raised to 6 chattacks for working adults and expectant and nursing mothers, 4 chattacks for other adults and 2 chattacks for children. The destitutes are fed only once a day. We shall, therefore, be deceiving ourselves if we think that they offer any real solution of the problem. I was told at Dacca where foodstuffs are being unofficially rationed by the Dacca Central Relief Committee under the presidency of the popular Sessions, Judge, Mr. De, that only 12 chattacks of rice and 20 chattacks of atta had been distributed per head by the mohalla committees in the course of a month and that there was a shortage everywhere not merely of rice, but of other foodstuffs

also with the possible exception of some pulses. Besides the price of scarcely any foodgrain was less than 12 annas per seer at least in any town. This is naturally having its effect on all classes of people, but⁷ people belonging to the lower middle class owing to their inability to beg are, perhaps, suffering more terribly than the other classes. Till I came to Bengal I thought that there might be some justification for the complaint that the Bengal Government was being unfairly attacked by its political opponents who were exaggerating the calamity for their own purposes. But I feel convinced now that the statements made by the public men of Bengal represented the bare truth and that they have rendered a service to their province by bringing the true facts to the notice of the Indian and the British public.

I find that the need for cloth is almost as great as for food. At present what is required are 'dhotis' and 'saris', but warm clothing will soon be urgently required, and if it is not forthcoming, it can easily be imagined what effects the inclemencies of the weather will have on the people already exhausted by starvation.

Mr. Amery has repeatedly stated in the House of Commons that the deaths from starvation were only about a thousand a week. I have no hesitation in saying that such a statement amounts to an attempt to conceal the true facts from the British public. My experience has convinced me that the mortality due to

scarcity of food is immensely greater. I was told in a big sub-division that it had been estimated that in that sub-division alone the deaths from starvation amounted to between 750 and 1,000 per week. It is feared that the situation will deteriorate considerably with the approach of winter owing to the want of warm clothing. Even in towns the death-rate is very high. Chandpur and Munshiganj reminded me of the horrible conditions prevailing in Contai. I do not want to use strong language, but I think that I would be failing in my duty to Bengal and the country if I did not frankly state the facts as I saw them.

I was frequently asked why all the foodgrains supplied to Bengal by the surplus province were being sent to Calcutta and why the waterways were not being used for despatch of food direct to Eastern Bengal ?

Members of the relief committees indignantly asked me whether the welfare of Calcutta alone was the concern of the Local Government and their districts had ceased to form part of Bengal. These questions require to be answered by the Government. There may be good reasons for not utilising waterways to send food direct to Eastern Bengal and starving the districts, while feeding Greater Calcutta, which the people are unaware of. If so, they should be clearly stated, so that the people may understand why they are being made to suffer.

There is serious anxiety among the people regarding

the policy which the Provincial Government will follow in respect of the " Aman " crop. They feel, and I think rightly, that it will be disastrous if the entire crop is purchased by the Government. It seems to be imperatively necessary that Calcutta and the higher towns should be rationed as early as possible in accordance with the policy recommended by the last Food Conference, but it will be nothing short of a catastrophe if the Bengal Government or any other Local Government tried in the present state of things to take possession of the entire stock of food within its jurisdiction.

The Bengal is suffering from a famine of almost unprecedented magnitude is an indescribably tragic fact, but I do not think it is due entirely to the failure of the last " Aman " crop in some districts or the cessation of imports from Burma. Even if the yield of the " Aman " crop fell short of the quantity required by 2 million people, as has been stated sometimes by the authorities, the distress is out of all proportion to the shortage. I feel, therefore, that the present crisis is to no small extent due to failure or unwillingness of the Bengal Government to recognise the gravity of the situation for a long time and to take comprehensive and resolute measures to deal with the emergency.

The Bengal Government has signally failed to discharge its duty towards the people of Bengal. The ultimate responsibility for the present catastrophe is

that of the British Government and the Government of India. What were they doing when things were going from bad to worse in Bengal? Why were they following what Lord Strabolgi has called in the recent debate in the House of Lords a policy of masterly inactivity in so vital a matter? The reasons given by the Under-Secretary of State in justification of their attitude and insult to injury. Apparently Mr. Amery and Lord Linlithgow attached importance to everything but their duty to save millions of human beings from starvation and death.

Mr. Amery has made much of the fact that wheat was imported into India in the concluding months of 1942-43. So far as I know, the British Government agreed to the importation of only 250,000 tons of wheat, and as has now been publicly stated, the Government of India, receiving about 150,000 tons, came to the conclusion that no more need be imported. The British public has forced the British Government to abandon its previous apathetic attitude but it remains to be seen whether the Indian authorities are still prepared to use the large powers with which the constitution invests them to rescue helpless and suffering Bengal from the disaster which threatens to engulf it. Let no one think that the present troubles will be over as soon as the 'Aman' crop, which happily promises to be a bumper crop, has been harvested. The upheaval that has taken place in both towns and villages cannot subside in a few

days or weeks. The most strenuous efforts will have to be made to rehabilitate those who have lost their all and to restore their old sense of self-respect and self-confidence and their pride in honest and hard work. The responsibility of the Central Government is, therefore, much heavier than it seems to think. The future of Bengal depends in no small measure on Lord Wavell.

(3)

"It can be safely said that the deaths in Bengal due to famine have exceeded two millions. The situation is such as to cause legitimate anxiety. If food does not reach the deficit areas, Bengal will be faced with a disaster greater than the one which overwhelmed it last year."

"Wherever I went I received complaints regarding high prices and inadequate supplies. I was told that rice was dearer in rural than in urban areas. The poor people cannot, therefore, afford to buy it. Free kitchens or dry-dole centres which are still open, are being resorted to by those who are without resources in fairly large numbers.

"No destitutes can be seen because, according to my information, most of them have died. Prices being very high already there is a general feel that last year's crisis may recur two or three months hence unless Government can make adequate arrangements to feed the deficit areas. So far as I could find out, this apprehension

exists in official circles also. It may be added that, as last year, not merely rice but all foodstuffs are selling at prices which the poor people cannot afford to pay.

“ I heard complaints regarding the irregular arrival of supplies, their inadequacy, and their inferior quality in almost every town I visited. I was shown samples of rice which justified the complaints. The rice was very coarse, and in part, unfit for human consumption. The failure of the Government to despatch adequate quantities of foodstuffs at regular intervals is the root cause of the high prices which are ruling at the present time. The success of the procurement policy will not be of the slightest use unless the necessary transport can be made available. Last year's crisis was in part due to the failure of the authorities to organise transport properly.

“ Contai, which had been devastated by the cyclone and flood of 1942 probably suffered more during the famine than any other part of Bengal. The people are still suffering acutely in some parts.”

“ The food situation being highly unsatisfactory, there can be no assurance that the epidemics of malaria, small-pox, etc., will be brought completely under control. All doctors there agree that unless food is available, such improvement as has taken place will not last.

“The Government scheme with regard to rehabilitation has not been made public yet, but it is necessary that immediate steps should be taken to resettle the petty

cultivators who have sold their holdings and the homeless agricultural labourers on the land or to enable them to earn their livelihood in some other way. Spinning and weaving, paddy-husking, mat-making and similar cottage industries which can prove invaluable in this connection should be made the fullest use of both by the Government and the relief organisations.

“The situation in Bengal is such as to cause legitimate anxiety. The people in the deficit districts are already in a difficult position. Should things take a turn for the worse, persons of all classes, including the middle class, will be seriously affected. The situation can yet be controlled without much difficulty. Abundant food is available in the province as a whole, but if, owing to maladministration in Bengal or the failure of the British Government and the Government of India to shoulder their responsibilities at this juncture, it does not reach the deficit areas, Bengal will be faced with a disaster greater than the one which overwhelmed it last year. And there will be no excuse for it. The war and the eastern front can afford no justification for it. The transport required to feed the people must be provided. In England, which imports two-thirds of its food can be fed in spite of the war, there is no reason why the people of India not be provided during the war with adequate quantities of the foodstuffs grown in their own country. If the situation is allowed to deteriorate, the responsibility will be that of the Central and the British Governments.”

APPENDIX II

HORRIBLE SCENES

(1)

At one of the kitchens in Faridpur I noticed a man lapping up food like a dog. I saw abandoned children in the last stages of emaciation ; men and women who had been without food for so long that they could now be fed only under strict medical supervision. Dead bodies were being daily picked up and also those who had fallen by the wayside through sheer exhaustion. A man after vainly wandering for food collapsed on the doorsteps of the Collector's court room. As the body was being removed, a woman huddled in a corner pushed out a bundle and cried 'take that also'. It was her dead child. At a kitchen, a woman had been walking every day more than a dozen miles to and from her home to take gruel to her sick and famished husband."

—*Sir Jagdish Parshad.*

(2)

How far the present distress has affected the economic basis of and sociopsychological relations within the family may be gauged from the fact that no less than 24.4 % of the families have disintegrated. Husbands have driven away wives and wives have deserted ailing

husbands, children have forsaken aged and disabled parents, and parents have also left home in despair. Brothers have turned deaf ears to the entreaties of hungry sisters. Tales of such woes blacken the face of our records, and show where civilization stands when faced with the primordial needs of man.

The total number of persons included in the 504 families is 1,566 which works out at an average of 3.1 persons per family. Of these 55.7% are women and 44.3% men. Adults among these 1,566 destitutes number 41.6%. Children 27.7% infants 26.3% and old people 4.4%.

From a cursory glance at our data it appears that these destitutes have not come here to stay for ever. Most of them have expressed their intention to go back to their homes as soon as the winter crop is ready for harvesting. They expect to get work and food then in the homes of their fore-fathers. But our knowledge of the villages and the prospects ahead do not inspire similar hope and confidence in us. At any rate, it is sure that some sort of relief will be necessary for a longer period and the country should be prepared for it.

"A survey of destitutes in Calcutta in the present food situation undertaken by the staff and students of the department of Anthropology of Calcutta University. The conclusion given in the report are based on studies of 504 families.)

(3)

During the last fortnight there has not been a morning on which I have not seen as I went out of the town on my jobs, dead bodies by the roadside. A fight between vultures and dogs over a corpse is no rare sight. The town is full of beggars and destitutes with all manner of infectious diseases, and disposal of dead bodies has become a problem. In the villages affairs are worse ; people are dying in large numbers of malaria and starvation. There are not enough able bodied men to burn the dead which often are just pushed into the nearest canal. If you go down the canal from Contai to Panipia, you will feel sick ; for the bloated dead bodies you will see will be numerous. I write these notes at Junput where I have just finished my weekly milk distribution ; as I came from Contai on my bullock cart I found one dead body near Dauki, one near Aladarput and two (very rotten) floating in the canal which flows out to sea at Baisha. We seem to need some corpse disposal squads for Contai.

Sudhir Ghosh Friends' Ambulance Unit.

(4)

Reports that appeared from day to day in various newspapers could hardly describe the unprecedented calamity that has overtaken rural Bengal, observed Mr. Syed Badrudduja, Mayor of Calcutta.

In giving the impression of his recent tour in the interior of Murshidabad, said he, that he had seen with his own eyes numerous cases of devitalisation—devitalisation

brought about by prolonged starvation. Hundreds of them had already succumbed, while thousands were awaiting their inevitable doom.

Cholera and malaria had already spread throughout the district and had begun to exact a heavy toll—mostly so in the Kandi sub-division as also in certain parts of Jangipur and Sadar sub-division. Adequate supply of only quinine and cholera vaccine and a little medical aid could have saved thousands of human lives.

This picture of gloom and horror, the Mayor remarked, was relieved by the only ray of hope represented by the beneficent activities of the relief organisations in the affected areas. But these, he thought, had touched only the fringe of the problem. Besides, the quantity of food per head supplied in the gruel kitchens was far too insufficient for a single meal a day and the numbers served therein were only a small fraction of the unfortunate destitutes, middle class families apart. *Syed Badrudduja, Mayor of Calcutta.*

(5)

I could never have imagined unless I had visited these places, "that things had come to a miserable pass. Children are the worst sufferers. I was told stories of parents having sold their sons and daughters for a handful of rice. She said that the situation was deteriorating with such rapidity that she felt that it had almost reached a stage when even full support and help from

the Central and Provincial Governments could not save Bengal. *Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.*

(6)

This morning about 9 o'clock I found a destitute boy of about 8 years unconscious and dying on the pavement in front of the Tollygunge police station. The condition of the case appeared to be partly due to starvation and exposure to weather conditions.

I inquired at the police station and the officer-in-charge informed me that the case was first reported to him last night by local residents ; he at once sent for an ambulance which took the boy to Sambhunath Pandit Hospital and later to the Medical College Hospital ; these refused to admit the boy and are reported to have noted in the ambulance driver' s diary. " No bed available." The driver, I gathered, brought back the boy and left him near the place from where he originally removed him.

Since then the boy had been lying there on the pavement until I saw him this morning. I again appealed to the police officer for help and he informed that whilst he has instructions to take action in reported cases of deaths he is unable to do anything in this case. Further he said he is also helpless in that no hospital will accept such cases. I felt that it was my duty to attend to the dying child. I therefore telephoned to the ambulance and got into touch with the Mayo Hospital who were kind enough to admit him.

Such disgraceful experience is a matter of common knowledge. Nevertheless the incident calls for wide publicity. Are passers-by so inured to such scenes and devoid of any touch of human feeling? Is this what civilization and education has brought to this country? And have hospitals and authorities no duty to such poor people? And what of the naked, hungry, destitute women and children, old and infirm, abounding in the city? Do they make no appeal to those who presume to be members of civilized human society?

G. Rama Badran, Calcutta.

(7)

Photographs depicting the acute distress caused by the Bengal food crisis continue to appear in the Calcutta press. A photo of a starving man hanging by the neck by a rope from a tree near the Kali Temple at Kalighat, Calcutta, is featured by the "Hindustan Standard" to-day. The caption describes it as a grim scene in present-day Bengal.

(8)

The "Amrita Bazar Patrika" publishes a report from Malda of the trial of a father on the charge of murder of his only son aged about 3 years on the 16th July on the ground of his inability to feed him and other members of his family who it was reported had no food for 3 or 4 days.

(9)

A woman in Khuluk sold her daughter for Rs. 15 owing to scarcity of food, says a report published by the

"Hindustan Standard" to-day. Her husband left her alone with a son and a daughter some days ago for want of food.

(10)

A report received from Palwa says that one hungry woman along with her 3 children had collected after a day's efforts nearly one seer of rice and when she was returning from town at dusk her rice were snatched by another hungry man. The woman was found piteously crying.

(11)

A Dacca message says "Visitors to the river bank have seen a pathetic sight on Sunday morning when they found the bodies of 2 children. Their mothers were crying bitterly blaming their lot that they had not been able to provide them with some food to save them from death.

(12)

Mr. S. G. Shah, Secretary of Bar Association, Bombay, who visited Dacca to study the distress prevailing in this area, told that 90 % of the population had no rice. The visitor if he went round the city would find thousands reduced to skin and bones. Children were dying in the arms of their parents who were waiting helplessly. Husbands were dying in front of their wives and *vice versa* for want of food.

(13)

Harrowing stories pour in from the mofussil. In Rangpur the body of a seventeen years old girl, a victim

of starvation was said to be seen devoured by vultures, while in Brahambaria, a villager lying weak and helpless by the roadside, was set upon by a jackal. The man was rescued but died shortly.

(14)

Men and women are feeding on jungle leaves and roots in Midnapore district, according to the Secretary of one Relief Committee.

Children lie on the roadside dust, women in rags hunt the dustbins in towns for morsels of food and babies are abandoned by starving parents. The trek of the starving to urban areas continues generally.

(15)

A shocking incident of jackals devouring a starving man has been reported from Barodi Union, in the Narayanjan sub-division. It is stated that recently a famished fisherman, who was reduced to skin and bone, came from the interior and took gruel in the free kitchen of the Union. Thereafter he lay down nearby for rest. In the morning, he was found with a portion of his body devoured by jackals, but he was still alive. Later, he died.

Deaths, owing to the food shortage, are occurring daily in large numbers in the Chandpur Area, writes a special representative of "Amrita Bazar Patrika," who has been investigating conditions there.

He adds that, owing to the fuel shortage, these bodies are being given mass burial. Sometimes bodies are also thrown into the river.

A report from Bera in Babna District state that the high cost of funeral rites is compelling people to throw dead bodies into the river. Six or seven deaths from cholera and small-pox, it adds, have been occurring there daily.

— — —

APPENDIX III.

RESPONSIBILITY ?

“ With the liability undertaken by the Government of India to feed Calcutta and the surrounding industrial area, and with the huge crop available for the rest of Bengal, there is absolutely no reason why people should still suffer or why there should be any food crisis in Bengal again in 1944. If that does happen due to the corruption and incompetence of the present ministry, the responsibility will lie heavily on the Government of India itself. A party ministry, soaked in communalism and factional spirit, which does not enjoy the confidence of large sections of the people and against which there are serious allegations of maladministration, must not be allowed to play with the lives of millions of human beings. Bengal's people ask for no charity, but demand the elementary right to be made free from want and misery. Let Lord Wavell and Mr. Casey look at Bengal's problem from a detached and impartial point of view, create a state of affairs which will render harmonious co-operation between the Government and the people possible for saving the province from ruin and destitution and not allow the welfare of the people to be

subordinated to any other consideration, political, communal or imperial."

Shyamaprasad Mookerjee.

"I have been Premier of Bengal for six long years, and I have the unbeaten record of being a Premier under provincial autonomy for the longest term in India. I have a right to demand that there should be a thorough and sifting enquiry by an impartial royal commission, composed of men of unquestioned ability and thoroughly imbued with the highest ideas of justice, equity and good conscience. I demand of the British nation that they should immediately take steps for the appointment of such a royal commission on the affairs of Bengal since December, 1941, upto the present day, and I make this demand as a Premier who for the longest period in any province in India has served the Empire faithfully and well."

"From this position, the Ministers have never realised during the six months that they have been in office. We, therefore, start with the fundamental proposition that when we (the previous Ministers) resigned, there was nothing like famine conditions in Bengal and whatever may have happened has happened only in consequence of the insufficient and reprehensible handling of the situation by the present Ministers and their British supporters."

A. K. Fazul-Haq.

“ The province is in the deadly grip of an awful catastrophe and from the rate at which depopulation is taking place, it is obvious that Bengal will not be able even to harvest her winter crops. In such tragic circumstances, Bengal cannot possibly serve as an effective base for operation in the Far East. This crisis has to be solved first before the campaign begins and unless food is taken out of provincial control and the department administered from the Centre, there can never be a solution. The Government of India must take absolute charge of supply and distribution of food, if Bengal is to be saved. This is no time for platitudes or recriminations. Action is demanded—prompt and definite ; otherwise, posterity will condemn us and condemn the United Nations. We shall stand guilty both before God and man.”

Sir A. Ghazavi

“ This famine sweeping India is man-made.” “ It is very largely the result of administrative chaos and muddle and refusal of administrators to obtain the co-operation of the people. At the same time India is threatened by a cunning and powerful enemy on her borders. The people are the defence against Fascism. We of these islands, people of the Soviet Union and China have demonstrated it in recent years. In India, on the other hand, we follow the reverse policy a tragic mistake which has borne bitter fruit in the present horrible conditions and is a political debacle which is harmful to the people of India and Britain alike. The people

of Britain have a responsibility for pressing for an immediate settlement, reversal of Mr. Amery's policy, release of prisoners and establishment of a National Government.... The United States and our Government bear the responsibility not only to India but to world opinion on this matter."

Mr. William Dobbie, Trade Union Leader London.

"In the eyes of the people of this country the Government of Great Britain and their henchmen here sitting opposite are responsible for the calamity."

"Here in India we have an irremovable and irresponsible Government, whose will is distasteful to the public. It was strange, that Great Britain, which boasts of democracy and professes to stand for the liberty and freedom of the world and hates Nazism and Fascism so much, should have installed in India a Government which was a cross-breed between Nazism and Fascism."

Mr. Abdul Qayum, M. L. A.

Mr. Jinnah thought it a pity that one had to participate in the debate under the shadow of the tragedy in which thousands were dying. "Supposing in England—leave alone thousands—if a few hundreds had died" he said, "I ask you, will Churchill's Government be able to sit on the treasury benches for 24 hours? Here we are told that recriminations and controversies should be avoided, when we are living under a system of Government which is irresponsible, irremovable and thoroughly incompetent, tied down by fetters to their master the Secretary of State.".....

“ It seems to me that you cannot get away from the charge that you have been guilty of gross negligence, you have failed to discharge your duties and responsibilities.”

M. A. Jinnah.

OUR OTHER PUBLICATIONS.

	Rs. As.
1. India Through the German Eyes by the author of <i>Four Years of Nazi Europe</i> ...	3 8
2. The Indian Struggle , by Prof. Darbara Singh ...	3 4
3. America Imperialist or Democrat , By the author of <i>India between the two wars</i> ...	1 8
4. Failure of Provincial Autonomy in India , By F. C. Mehta M. A. ...	1 14
5. Mother Land , By C. N. Zutshi ...	2 4
6. India's Fight for Freedom , by Sardul Singh Caveeshar ...	3 14
7. Personality and Political Ideas of Subhas Bose. Is he Fascist? By Hira Lal Seth ...	1 14
8. Gandhi in Arms , by Hira Lal Seth ...	0 12
9. Churchill on India , by Hira Lal Seth (Bound) 2nd edition ...	1 14

BIOGRAPHIES.

1. Madame Chiang Kai Shek , (The greatest woman of the world) by Prof. J. Bright ...	2 8
2. Mr. Allah Bux (India's Nationalist No. 1.) by Prof. J. Bright ...	0 12
3. Tagore (The Sentinel of the East) by Durlab Singh ...	2 0
4. Sardar Vallabhai Patel, (The Iron Dictator) by H. L. Seth ...	1 14
5. Subhas Bose (The Rebel President), by Durlab Singh ...	2 0
6. Jawahar Lal Nehru (The Red Star of the East), by H. L. Seth ...	1 14
7. Allama Mashraqi (The Khaksar Leader), by H. L. Seth ...	1 4
8. Master Tara Singh (The Akali Leader), by Durlab Singh ...	2 4
9. Sir Stafford Cripps , (Let his past records speak) ...	0 4

Hero Publications

6, Lower Mall,
Lahore.

Any book not available at any local bookstall can be had direct from the publishers at Lahore.



Acc No. _____

