

Communist Search For Divinity

By MANOJ DAS

IT was night — dead of night — in June 1956 when this author and his two comrades were ushered into the presence of D N Aidit, the brilliant secretary general of the Communist Party of Indonesia, at the party's central office in Jakarta. He was then Asia's third most important Communist leader, next to Mao and Ho Chi Minh. He was young, for the entire elderly leadership of the archipelago had been wiped out a few years ago in what was notoriously called the Madun Affairs. (Aidit too was to be killed in the bloody civil war of 1966, following an abortive Communist bid to take over the government through a couple of sympathising generals.)

Khrushchev had lately exploded his report at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, exposing the cult of personality Stalin had built up through treachery, innumerable secret murders and ruthless suppression, including mass massacres. It is not easy to describe our anguish — the anguish of 'true believers' — on learning about the fallibility of Stalin and the system he epitomised. For he had long replaced God in our consciousness. And God could do no wrong.

'Comrade Aidit, you were present at the Soviet Congress as a fraternal delegate. What was your reaction to the report?' we asked, as soon as we settled down around a

small table, munching roasted groundnuts and sipping black tea. He listened to his interpreter and banged his forehead thrice or so, before he could formulate some apology. I have forgotten his rational explanation, but I can never forget his irrational gesture, a mute admission of defencelessness before the unforeseen tide of events.

Stalin was awful, yet providence — call it time-spirit if you please — used him to counteract the horrendous evil that was Hitler. Alexander could be a megalomaniac, a 'legion' of raw ambitions. But time-spirit is amoral. It could achieve through him a bridge between the East and the West.

The same truth could apply to Lenin. He led a revolution. Probably it would be, factually, more correct to say that he represented a revolution. That did not oblige him to be an angel of sorts. But we must look for symbols. That is almost a divine trait in us, a peripheral expression of our psychic trust in the absolute good that is there, somewhere. After all, "an eternal perfection is moulding us into its own image" (Sri Aurobindo).

Hence, for many, Lenin continues to be a symbol of perfection. They need not be disillusioned about the reality of perfection, but must be reminded of the difference between illusion and reality. They should not dream of

perfection, a far-fetched state of consciousness, in politicians, leaders and even statesmen.

It is embarrassing that some young enthusiasts and old intellectuals of Kolkata's leftist club should grab headlines through their protest against the depiction of Lenin as a manic depressive towards the end of his life, in Alexander Sokurov's *Taurus*, a Russian picture of some international fame, at the Kolkata film festival. It is even more embarrassing what the actor playing Lenin, Leonid Mozgovoi, had to say, "This is a problem with those who think Lenin was God". It is past time these intellectuals learnt to do without that kind of God.

"How could such a film be made?" asked the veteran Jyoti Basu, the former Communist chief minister of West Bengal. Needless to say, it could be made because the Russians have been liberated from their ideological tribalism whereas Mr Basu and his ilk are still enslaved to their illusion. "Slavery holds few men fast; the greater number hold fast their slavery", said Seneca. How true he sounds even after two thousand years!

It is time intellectuals of this category understood the elementary truth



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that the Russians knew Lenin and Stalin and the Chinese knew Mao — at least as human beings — better than the Indian disciples of Marx. China has not hesitated to bare Mao's feet of clay. But there are Indians who would rather go blind than see them. Religion as politics is bad, but politics as religion is worse.

"Our story is a private account of a clever person who wanted to change the world and did so. But faced with death and the inevitable destiny of having to give up power can have a strange effect on the most strong person", explained Mozgovoi, giving a psychology lecture to the pre-university students. He had to.

Mozgovoi's is the most prudently realistic assessment of Lenin between two extreme attitudes. The first of the two was Churchill's: "It was with a sense of awe that they (the Germans) turned upon Russia the most grisly of all weapons. They transported Lenin in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus from Switzerland into Russia". The second: the attitude of the Kolkata protesters.

The most ghastly and bizarre metaphor I have ever come across, however, is one innovated by Lenin himself. It was concerning the British labour leader Arthur Henderson. "We will support Henderson as a rope supports a man who is hanged", wrote Lenin in 1920. I am afraid, my Kolkata leftist friends are supporting Lenin in the same way.