

Some Asian Dilemmas

Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations, by Gunnar Myrdal. *New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1968. 3 vols. 2,284 pp. \$25.00 (hard covers); and New York: Pantheon Books, 1968, \$8.50 (paper covers).*

ACCORDING TO A report published in *The New York Times*, March 11, 1968, there are two Gunnar Myrdals. One is the scholar, represented in this extensive study made possible by grants totalling \$250,000 from the Twentieth Century Fund and also supported since 1961 by Dr. Myrdal's Institute for International Economic Studies in Stockholm. The scholarly Myrdal is also renowned for his classic and prescient examination in 1944 of the problems of the Negro in the United States on which he elaborated in *An American Dilemma*. In addition, he is remembered for his ten years of duty, 1947-1957, as executive secretary of The United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe. The other Myrdal is the controversial public figure, the tilter at Sweden's Establishment, one of a small group of intellectuals in the left wing of the governing Social Democratic Party. He is regarded by his critics at home as a too brilliant man with a monumental self-confidence and a compulsion to tell the whole world what is wrong with it. While Dr. Myrdal deplores United States' policies in Vietnam and favors an American withdrawal, he has sought in newspaper articles to oppose extreme leftists who contend that the war shows the complete bankruptcy of the American way of life and of capitalism in general. In this he has clashed head-

on with his son, Jan Myrdal, a 40-year-old leftist, also an author, who is a leader of a student anti-war and anti-American group, the National Liberation Front Committee.

Dr. Myrdal's wife, Alva, is a Minister Without Portfolio in charge of disarmament affairs for the Swedish government. Also a writer, she is likewise an expert on population problems, education, and social problems in general. She was Sweden's Ambassador to India when her husband arrived there in 1957 to begin his study, the subtitle of which is reminiscent of Adam Smith's "Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations." In fact, Dr. Myrdal says in the preface to this work that, like the eighteenth century economist, he has preferred to study the region's problems not strictly as economic ones but "in their demographic, social, and political setting."

The problem of Asia is the problem of modernization. By modernization is meant a persistent and continuous change, either actively or passively, of a nation's political institutions, economic organizations, social formations, and the people's minds as a result of rapid progress of science and technology. In Volume 1, Dr. Myrdal deals mainly with the political and economic problems of the nations in Asia. For instance, he writes that, "Behind its impressive parliamentary façade, India is still very far from being controlled by the majority of its people, or even from having its policies devised as to be in the interest of masses In spite of Gandhi's exertions, the independence movement did not penetrate deeply into the social setting of rural India. Universal suffrage has since compelled the politicians to come to terms with the dominant elements in that setting, the rural elite of landowners, merchants, and moneylenders." About Pakistan he says, "that it survived in the first place was almost a miracle What hope there is for progress in Pakistan must be attached to the present quasidictatorial regime: to its ability, despite its very narrow class basis, to advance national goals of planning,

equality, and consolidation and to purge the state of corruption." Of Ceylon, he writes: "The goals of political stability and national unity, which involve regularizing relations between the majority and minority communities within a system of representative government, seemed as far away as ever." With regard to Burma and Indonesia, he says: "The nature of the liberation struggle was such that the main political education of the nationalist leaders in both countries was in agitation, rebellion, and conspiracy rather than in the responsible exercise of power. . . . Considering the record since independence, it is a wonder that both states have not completely disintegrated. To this day, neither state exercises control over the whole of its territory." The main political problem of Malaysia, he found, "has been the promotion of harmonious relations and a sense of national solidarity within a system of parliamentary democracy among ethnic communities sharply differentiated by economic condition, religion, customs and language." As for the Philippines: "Perhaps in no other country in South Asia is political dishonesty so widely recognized, accepted, and talked about as part of the political game. . . . This largely explains why, despite its comparative prosperity, the Philippines has experienced so little industrial progress, agrarian reform and democratization of its society in depth." In Thailand he noted that, "Concern with the need for internal stability and a strong central government in the face of foreign pressure has been a force making for conservation. . . . It has provided a convenient justification for the methods by which a ruling oligarchy has maintained an unchallenged hold on the spoils of power. There is little prospect of changing the basic feature of the regime." He found that in Cambodia "the linchpin of the political system is Sihanouk's personal power, combined with a mandarin class of civil servants . . ." and that "there have been no fundamental efforts to modernize Cambodia or to arouse its people out of their accustomed stupor." In Laos, there

is "no hope for peace and stability . . . unless there is a settlement of the more bloody struggle in Vietnam such as to bring about a slackening of cold war tensions through the whole area."

Myrdal devotes about twenty pages of the book to the Vietnam war and its background. "The first few years of Diem's government," he writes, "must be considered an era of remarkable achievement. . . . For a time the combination of Diem's forceful and shrewd political leadership at home and America's all-out and diversified assistance seemed about to accomplish the miracle of building up anarchic and destitute South Vietnam to the point where it would become a politically stable and economically viable, separate state." However, Myrdal then goes on to advocate a policy of disengagement by the United States.

For many centuries Vietnam defended itself against Chinese encroachment and sought a distinct identity. There is no reason to suppose that this tradition would be kept alive under a Communist regime To the Vietnamese people, a Communist state, intent on preserving a maximum of independence from China, could hardly be a worse alternative than a prolongation of the misery they have suffered these past twenty years. In view of the mounting material, political, and moral costs of present U.S. policies, it is difficult to understand how the situation can look difficult to the United States.

Dr. Myrdal's suggestion would be more convincing had he provided an adequate answer to the query whether, if Communist China had not undertaken the "Great Cultural Revolution," since 1966, thus incapacitating her and preventing her from encroaching upon her neighboring countries, particularly Vietnam, Hanoi would have been able to preserve the present state of independence. Indeed, "reality" in South Asia, as Dr. Myrdal himself acknowledges, "will be found to be a rather elusive notion when viewed through glasses shaped by Western experience."

Volume II is concerned largely with the social problems of the Asian world. Myrdal expresses serious concern in particular about the labor force both in industry and agriculture. Three-fourths of South Asia's labor force is tied up in agriculture. But Dr. Myrdal's report estimates that the output of agricultural land was "probably only about half as much as China or Europe." Particularly in India but also in most of the other South Asian countries he finds that a "substantial part of the male labor force does not engage in any form of work and many women do not participate in outdoor work; the extent of both types of abstention from productive activity differs not only among countries but also among social and economic strata. Much more important is the fact that most of those who do work, work for only short periods (per day, week, month, and year) and not very efficiently." This situation is the more serious because of the rapid population increase. He tells us that at present, "the ratio of the agricultural population to the total population ranges from around fifty per cent to over eighty per cent in the several South Asian countries" and that "the absorptive capacity of the non-agricultural sectors is severely limited." Surveying the needs of the South Asian region, Dr. Myrdal urges that birth control education be expanded to brake a population upsurge of two per cent a year between 1950 and 1960, which is double the rate of Europe and Asian Russia. Otherwise, he says, South Asia faces a sixty per cent increase in population between 1960 and 1980 to 1.15 billion or 1.25 billion people.

The crucial problem, therefore, as he sees it, is to increase agricultural production. This would prevent a large part of the population in South Asia from suffering food deficiencies and would also provide an accumulation of needed capital for the farm families to use for industrial development. To increase agricultural productivity, Dr. Myrdal suggests that (1) "without any innovations and even without any investment other than longer and more efficient

work, agricultural yields could be raised very substantially," (2) "still greater increases in yields could be attained by applying modern scientific agricultural technology. . . . Little work has been done on climate, soil, crops, breeds of livestock, etc., for the tropical and subtropical regions of South Asia." Of the two, Dr. Myrdal places more emphasis on the first. The low yield per acre, he found, "is mainly a consequence of the under utilization of the labor force. An increase in the labor output—achieved by improving participation ratios and the duration and efficiency of work—would raise yields, even without any technological innovations or additional investments."

In Volume III, Myrdal discusses problems of the quality of population, in which health and education play the dominant role. The new medical discoveries and the technique of mass campaigns enabled the South Asian governments to decrease vastly their mortality rates with only a relatively minor expenditure of resources. But efforts to prevent and cure disease, he realizes, "will increasingly require reforms in the fields of nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene and an increase in the supply of properly trained medical and paramedical personnel, equipment, clinics, and hospitals." However, consideration should be given to the revived interest of some of the South Asian countries in the indigenous systems of medicine. In India and Ceylon, Dr. Myrdal found that "influential adherents of *ayurveda* and *unani* succeeded in enlisting official support for research and training in these systems. In India, in particular, there was sympathy for bringing about a synthesis of modern and indigenous medicine."

Besides the problem of health which concerns people's bodies, there is the problem of education which concerns their minds. An exhaustive analysis of this problem led Dr. Myrdal to point out that "what is needed is not simply an expansion of educational facilities and their reappportioning to serve the various age groups,

both sexes, and all social classes, but a more purposive selection of the knowledge and skills taught, the attitudes implanted, and the learning methods employed." The major need is for a radical change in the entire educational system. Today in South Asia, Myrdal finds, "the modernization ideology, giving emphasis to equality of opportunity—primarily under the influence of Western ideals reinforced by Communist doctrines—inspires a few enlightened leaders among the articulate groups to crusade for radical educational reform. . . . The outcome of the widely publicized 'race' with Communist China will largely depend on whether the South Asian countries, with their varying political systems, have the same determination as China to reform their educational institutions."

As a whole, this critical study is as frank as it is soul-searching. It brings important insights to the problems of modernization in Asia. Modernization may be described in non-industrial societies as the transposition of certain roles—professional, technical, administrative—and the transposition of institutions supporting these roles—hospitals, schools, universities, bureaucracies. However, non-industrial modernizing societies, particularly in South Asia, lack the powerful integrating thrust found in industrial societies. Politics become the mechanism of integration, and authority is the crucial problem confronting the leaders. This leads to a consideration of the political forms, democratic or otherwise, most appropriate to producing and coping with modernization. Success or failure to achieve this objective determines the legitimacy or existence of the authority. However, in the last analysis, the efficiency of the political system depends upon the general social acceptance of its policy in the minds of the people. The emphasis, Myrdal states, "is placed on education of the sort that Nehru called 'training people's minds'—a rationalistic variation of Gandhi's prescription, 'a change of hearts.' In India an intellectual and moral conversion tends to be advanced as a panacea for all

kinds of ills. But to change attitudes without changing social institutions is a hopeless quest. This remains the basic dilemma and challenge of Indian politics." However, no matter how preoccupied we must be with renovating the social institutions appropriate to support all the reforms and changes expected of them, we must never forget that the end of all social institutions is not their own survival but the development of the human mind. The social system must be as modernized as man can make it, and this involves some very delicate and serious work not always fully understood by those who concentrate on their Western system and experience. It will be a tragedy if, in our response to the enormous demands placed on social reforms, we save the boat but swamp the passengers.

Realizing the complexities of all the problems facing the Asian world today, we must admit that Dr. Myrdal has provided in this work at least a diagnosis of the ills and difficulties found in this critical area of unusual concern. It might be that Dr. Myrdal would find it easier to offer more constructive and positive solutions to these difficulties if he were to visit Taiwan, the site of the Republic of China. In his writings, he compared the problems of South Asia with those of Communist China which, particularly after the "Great Cultural Revolution" in 1966, offers very little except chaos and confusion for comparison. Not so with Taiwan.

The people in Taiwan enjoy the highest standard of living in East Asia, second only to those in Japan. This achievement can be attributed to many factors. The key factor is land reform—the crucial problem facing most South Asian nations. Though the details of Asia's tenancy patterns differ from country to country, in essence the problem is the same. Why have reforms succeeded in Taiwan while elsewhere others have fallen short of their goals, and still others have gotten nowhere, as Dr. Myrdal reports? In many respects, the realization of agrarian reform is the precondition to economic growth and social progress. How-

ever, reform assumes basically a developmental process. At first, it is unstable and in a state of constant flux, as it turns in all directions and faces all kinds of problems and difficulties. Although Taiwan has not yet provided all the answers, still marked progress has been achieved in political, economic, social, and educational endeavors. Taiwan serves as an encouraging and exemplary model for those in Asia who aim to modernize. If a second edition of this most valuable study is printed in the future, it is earnestly hoped that Dr. Myrdal will include this information about Taiwan so that developing Asian countries will be made aware of the important and much-needed experience to be derived from the Island, formerly called by the Portuguese and the world, "Ilha Formosa"—Isle Beautiful.

Reviewed by PAUL K. T. SIH

The Quest for a Cause

A Dissenter's Guide to Foreign Policy,
edited by Irving Howe. *New York:*
Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1968. 349 pp.
\$6.95.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to predict with any confidence the outcome of the current struggle between the forces of radical change—specifically that small but highly vocal group of political activists who call themselves the New Left—and those who oppose them in the interest of order, tradition, and political stability. That the New Left, now composed largely of college-age youth, will have some permanent impact on our political life can hardly be doubted; the doubt concerns the degree and direction of the impact, for the diverse elements