

Youth Politics The Same Old Game

By Chaitanya Kalbag

What is the current state of youth politics? Every youth organisation is dominated by the parent party and suffers from the prejudices of old politicians. Every youth organisation is dormant most of the time but takes to street warfare when roused. Youth politics are only a youthful version of the rot that has eaten into our political system.



Raghu Rai

NONE of us were in Germany in the 1930s to watch the Hitler Youth in their khaki uniforms and swastika armbands singing 'Tomorrow belongs to us' or 'Deutschland uber alles' (Germany above all). But we can imagine how inspiring the anthems must have been, how easy it must have been to be moved by the young Nazis' fervour. The Third Reich must have looked invincible in those days.

India has often been stirred by the militancy of her youth. It has engendered hope that things can't be too bad as long as we have our patriotic youth to take up the reins. "My hope lies in the youth of this country," said Mahatma Gandhi in 1925. Half a century later, another Gandhi tried to put those words into practice when he got the opportunity to do so during the Emergency. Never before had the march towards a better tomorrow looked more promising than when it was led by Sanjay's khadi-clad storm-troopers.

How and why did Sanjay's plans for the country go awry? Mainly because both Sanjay and his followers developed into ambitious young politicians. They parroted Sanjay's claim that he did not believe in 'isms'. They announced that they would work more and talk less. Yet, that is precisely what they did not do: as the Emergency progressed, talk about youth power outstripped whatever youth activism there may have been. Sanjay and the Youth Congress began to believe in their own invincibility. In their hurry, they tried to thrust youth politics into premature adulthood. And, like many upstart adolescents, the Youth Congress was delivered a mighty clout when Sanjay's mother was hustled out of office in March 1977.

In many ways the Youth Congress before and during the Emergency provides an excellent example of youth politics in India: heavily subsidised and patronised by the country's major political parties, youth politicians all too soon develop into mindless satellites of their parent bodies. They mimic every twist and subterfuge their patrons resort to, and in the end there is nothing youthful or cleanly political about their actions: the goal is power, the power that flows from legislative benches and ministerial cushions.

Why did the Emergency turn out to be such a fiasco? Because it developed from Indira's Emergency into Sanjay's Emergency. And logically, the rejection of the Emergency by the country's voters ought to have sounded the death-knell for the Youth Congress. Did this happen? Was there a sudden end to youth politics in India? For a short while it seemed so, for Indira's regime was succeeded by the Janata's bickering gerontocracy. But if youth possesses one enduring quality, it is that it cannot be suppressed for too long. Indira provides the best illustration for this herself. Her encouragement of Sanjay was hardly surprising. Hadn't Nehru quietly placed more and more of the Congress Party machine in her hands between 1955 and 1959? But let us examine the history of the Youth Congress.

The Youth Congress

It was in the 1970s that this largely dormant wing of the Congress Party came into its own. In West Bengal, Priyaranjan Das Munshi, who led the Chhatra Parishad, was sowing the seeds of power when he spearheaded Siddhartha Shankar Ray's campaign to 'wipe out' the CPM during the 1971

election. Das Munshi is popularly credited with having pioneered the "goonda" politics for which the YC later became notorious. There was enough willing 'youth power' available: Calcutta's streets were full of unemployed young men eager to get into brawls. These early recruits did not believe in scruples in achieving their objective. One common accusation levelled against the YC both by its 'traditional' enemies and by people who have once worked for it and have then fallen out is that it is stuffed with these non-political, unscrupulous, 'lumpen' elements.

Das Munshi reportedly paid his Calcutta 'hit men' a monthly stipend of Rs 120 each. It was Chicago-type gang warfare, financed by the Congress's coffers. The Marxists have never forgiven Das Munshi for the violence he unleashed; if today YC(S) workers in West Bengal complain of harassment by CPM cadres, they ought to hark back to 1971 when the whip was in the other hand. In any case Indira rewarded Das Munshi for his work by investing him with the presidency of the Indian Youth Congress.

Under Das Munshi's leadership the YC quickly developed into a formidable force; its base in the

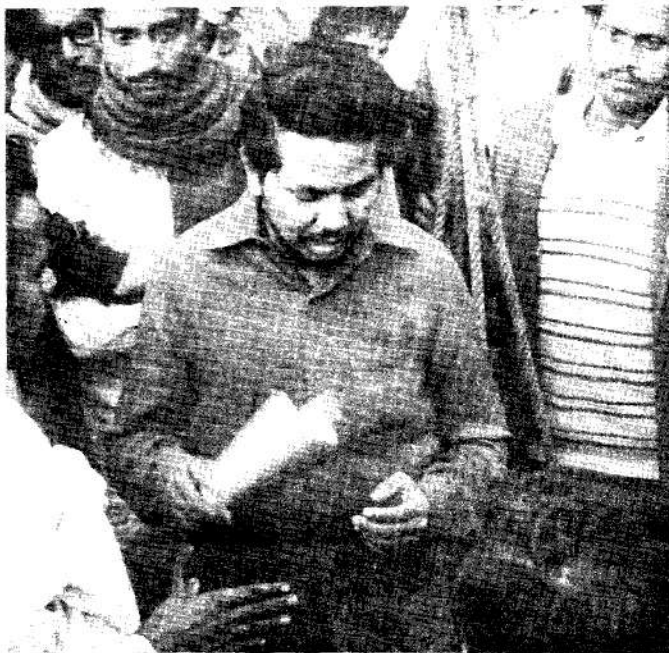


Youth protest, particularly when it is blessed by opposition parties, is put down ruthlessly by the police and other paramilitary wings.

northern states particularly was very strong. Youth Congressmen often acted as 'fronts' for the High Command in Delhi. It was widely believed that they had a voice in ministerial decisions, dispensation of favours, and local power bargaining. 'Priyo', as Das Munshi is 'affectionately' known, became a 'super-boss'.

It was then that Sanjay Gandhi began to take active interest in the YC. At first he was content to stay backstage, accumulating 'experience'. He had the tacit backing of Mrs Gandhi, and it soon became apparent that Das Munshi's days were numbered. When Mrs Gandhi clamped down the Emergency in June 1975, Sanjay openly began to assert himself. He made it clear that he wanted Das Munshi to be replaced by Ambika Soni. A signature campaign was started against Das Munshi, and in November 1975 he was unceremoniously dethroned by Mrs Soni. Most of Das Munshi's 'boys' in the YC were weeded out. Another Sanjay man, Raj Kaushik, was nominated president of the important Delhi Pradesh Youth Congress.

We must, however, note that Sanjay's hegemo-



Priyaranjan Das Munshi when he was the YC president.

nism did not extend to the South. This was because way back in 1969, three young men, A.K. Antony, Vayalar Ravi and K.P. Unnikrishnan, had laid the foundations of the Kerala Youth Congress. The KYC succeeded the Kerala Students' Union, another body created with the purpose of 'countering' the communist 'threat' in that state. The KYC was never like Das Munshi's Chhatra Parishad. And even at the height of the Emergency, it was clear that Sanjay would not be too welcome in Kerala and the other southern states.

There is hardly any need to recount the Youth Congress role during the Emergency. Muscle-power reigned supreme, and forcing the pace of sterilisation became the YC's most important programme. By the time the Gauhati convention of the All India Youth Congress came around in November 1976, Sanjay's confidence had grown and Ambika had become a mere rubber-stamp, as she later herself admitted. At Gauhati, Mrs Gandhi admitted that the YC had stolen her thunder. But in 1977, she called for elections

against Sanjay's advice. Soon after the election announcement the YC demanded 50 per cent of all Congress electoral tickets. That this rash move led to Jagjivan Ram's 'defection', the Congress's abrupt volte face on youth tickets, and the subsequent thrashing it received at the hustings, is now history. It was a case of too much power, too soon. And people thought it would be a valuable lesson for the likes of Sanjay. Youth power would never again attempt to sweep commonsense aside with its brash radicalism, they said. How wrong they were!

Post-Emergency precipitation

In the first flush of the Janata victory, Jayaprakash Narayan announced the formation of the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini on 27 March 1977. It was supposed to be a 'watchdog' body, as well as a possible counterweight for governmental corruption. After all, JP had been responsible for a huge boost to the country's non-Congress youth movement when in early 1974 he had given 'spiritual guidance' to the Nav Nirman agitation in Gujarat that unseated the Chimanbhai Patel ministry, and later in November that year led the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti revolt against the Abdul Ghafoor ministry in Bihar. The Bihar movement was quickly joined by various youth bodies, prominently the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and the Samajwadi Yuvajana Sabha (SYS). For a short while it looked as though, under JP's guidance, there would be a coming together of youth bodies.

During the Emergency youth leaders of non-Congress hues had been bundled into prison. A few had escaped arrest, operating underground. It was then that talk of a unification of various youth bodies to counter the Youth Congress began to circulate. Just before the Emergency, an All India Student Leaders' Conference had been convened at Allahabad. JP had addressed it. A coordination committee had also been formed at a national conference of university union office-bearers. Arun Jaitley of the ABVP was its convenor. But there were only meetings then and at the conference table, each youth body only touted the 'line' of its parent political party. No common programme emerged.

Things began to take shape when the new youth leader-aspirants of the country gathered at a 'summit' at Sarnath on April 16-17 1977. Ten organisations sent five representatives each to the conference: the Bharatiya Yuva Sangh (the Jana Sangh's youth wing), the ABVP (which, though it denies it, is the RSS 'educational' wing), the Lohia Vichar Manch, the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, three factions of the Samajwadi (Socialist) Yuvajana Sabha led by Sharad Yadav, V Mayakrishnan and Markandeya Singh, the Youth Congress (O), the Yuva Lok Dal (the BLD's youth wing) and the Samajwadi Yuvak Sabha.

For two days the youth leaders squabbled and bargained like seasoned politicians. The main debate was over whether or not the Janata Party ought to have a youth wing. The ABVP said it did not wish to be any party's youth wing. The Bharatiya Yuva Sangh however said it *wanted* to be the official Janata youth wing. This was just like the RSS saying it would never join any government and the Jana Sangh happily joining the Janata coalition. The Lohia Vichar Manch agonised over the dilemma of whether its members ought to go in for dual membership of the Janata Party. Finally, all the youth organisations except the ABVP, the Bharatiya Yuva Sangh and the

Lohia Vihar Manch united under the name of the Yuva Janata. The YJ emphatically declared that it would *not* be the youth wing of the ruling party. But the BYS was willing to assume that role, and it metamorphosed into the Janata Yuva Morcha. To this day, ABVP and LVM maintain their separate identities.

So the wheel had come full circle. The Yuva Congress (if one were to Hindi-ise Sanjay's organisation) was succeeded by the Yuva Janata. In more ways than one, Dr Jekyll seemed to have succeeded Mr Hyde. But the new conglutination of youth bodies has, in the light of two years' functioning, proved to be as much of a mish-mash as the combination of parent bodies. And, worst of all, the lackadaisical manner in which these youth bodies have functioned has led to the ominous revival of Sanjay's renegade YC(I).

Proxy politics

There is not one youth leader in India who is independent of patronage by a senior politician. The

rot began with the Youth Congress and extends into the Yuva Janata and the other youth bodies. As a result 'youth' leaders are used by their godfathers to further their own interests; manipulation and machination are common; youth bodies are invariably used as the corps for the parent parties' street politics. Issue after issue that is taken up by a youth-body is nothing but the parent party's pet obsession. And most significantly, not one youth body has ever had elections for its officebearers: they are either directly nominated by the senior party bosses or are 'unanimously' elected in fake single-candidate polls. It is nothing but politics by proxy. This is how our youth politicians forfeit their claims of representing the youth of this country.

The 'Sanjay caucus' is not a joke: it exists even now, perhaps even stronger than it was during the Emergency. Sanjay's hold extends over most of the northern states. Prior to 1977, Deepak Malhotra was the general secretary of the National Students Union of India (NSUI—the Congress's student wing) and president of the Delhi unit of the NSUI. But Malhotra was one of those honest workers who did not have



A familiar scene: teargas, lathis and rifles being unleashed against demonstrating youth. Do agitational tactics pay off in anything but counterviolence?



Our version of the 'brown shirts' ? This was the militaristic extent to which youth power went during the Emergency—Ambika and Sanjay being presented with a 'guard of honour' at Gauhati airport, November 1976.

any godfather to root for him, and he was consequently brushed aside in his bid for presidentship of the NSUI and Geetanjali Sharma, Shankar Dayal's daughter was nominated to the post. Previous incumbents in that post were Mohan Kumaramangalam's son, Rangarajan, and former Director, Intelligence Bureau Gopalan's son, Mohan. The present president of the NSUI is a nonentity called K.K. Sharma who is backed by Sanjay's man from UP, N.D. Tewari. In UP, the state YC(I) Chief is the Raja of Amethi's son, Sanjay; in Punjab, it was once Giani Zail Singh's nephew. In Haryana, the YC committee is full of Bansi Lal's 'boys'. And in Bihar, Jagannath Mishra, another Sanjay admirer, has stocked the state YC(I) with his nominees.

It is not surprising that many of Sanjay's former lieutenants, not the least being Ambika Soni, have broken away from him. Geetanjali Sharma is now married to Lalit Maken, once a president of the Delhi Pradesh Youth Congress and today one of the most vocal opponents Sanjay has within the Congress(I). Deepak Malhotra gave up politics in disgust and today teaches at the Dyal Singh College in Delhi.

Proxy politics took another form just after the Emergency, when Congress president Brahmananda Reddi dissolved the Youth Congress. It was a transparently deceptive move, for almost immediately Lalit Maken spoke to 'Madam', a conference of state youth

leaders was called and the Congress Youth Forum was formed. Ramachandra Rath from Orissa was its President and Maken its General Secretary. This had been preceded, in March 1977, by the nomination of Das Munshi as Youth Congress president by Reddi's predecessor, Borooah, while Janardhan Singh Gehlot, clearly a Sanjay man, was nominated president of the YC by its National Council! So the YC had not one but two presidents for a brief while and then was followed by the CYF.

When the question of nomination of the president of the Delhi unit of the CYF came up, Jagdish Tytler's name came up. Tytler had, during the fag-end of the Emergency, been the DPYC president. "I was in that office for just six months," he says. But Tytler was nevertheless another Sanjay man. Now, however, Sanjay was keen on getting Tytler in as the Delhi CYF chief, but Tytler backed out, saying he was busy with the administration of his adoptive father's school. So a long-time YC worker, Prem Swaroop Nayyar, was nominated instead. We must note that Tytler had never been a YC worker until late 1976 when he suddenly shot into the picture. He had no support at all among the YC ranks.

In June 1978, five months after Indira Gandhi broke away from the Congress Party to form the Congress(I), the Youth Congress(I) was reconstituted. Rath was still its president, and Maken its



If there is any one organisation that is helping shape young people into disciplined and yet intensely chauvinistic and irrational human beings it is the RSS. A 'shakha' like this one shows up youth power at its most awesome.

general secretary. But in Delhi, Sanjay suddenly decided to have Tytler nominated as the DPYC(I) president, demoting Nayyar to general secretaryship. Rath had promised Nayyar and Maken, who supported him, that he would give their boys 50 per cent of the Delhi posts; but 26 of the 30 berths going went to Tytler's (and therefore Sanjay's) men. Angrily, Maken resigned as the YC(I) general secretary. "Rath was also nothing but a rubber stamp," he told me. "Nothing had changed, nothing at all. And because I couldn't be totally ignored, I was nominated general secretary of the Delhi Pradesh Congress(I) Committee! Tytler divided Delhi into seven districts: two of them were led by his school's PT Master and bus-driver! What was the point in talking of democratic functioning then?"

The Yuva Janata

What about the Yuva Janata? Although it was a youth organisation supported by the ruling party, it could not gain any ground at all. Its different constituents' rivalry had ostensibly ended, but personal ambitions were still rampant. When there were elections to some states in June 1977 the YJ leaders unashamedly jockeyed for tickets. Many were elected to either Parliament or state legislatures, and there

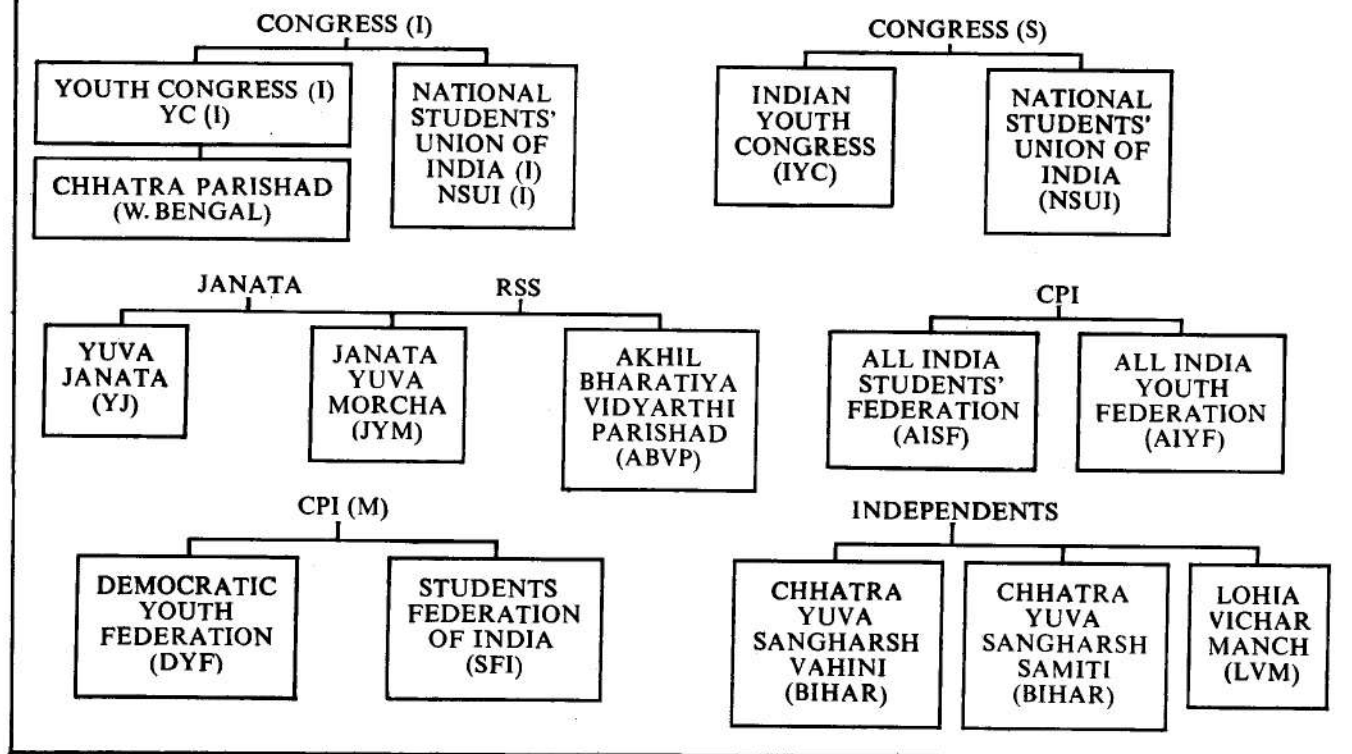
their idealism seemed to end. Until April 1979 the YJ president was V. Mayakrishnan (who was Morarji's man, from the old YC(O) group). In April the YJ held its first national convention at Bhopal. There was no report presented at all on what exactly the YJ had done during the two years of its existence. There was only a 'Yuva Janata Economic Policy' paper, presented by Mayakrishnan, which demanded things like the 'socialisation of industry', 'parity between prices of industrial products and agricultural food' and 'one man only one profession'!

Sharad Yadav, a Lok Sabha MP, was 'elected' the new YJ president. Yadav is Madhu Limaye's man and so immediately set out to denounce the RSS and the Jamshedpur riots that had occurred just then. Funnily enough, a parallel executive committee was formed, with Vinay Kumar as president. Vinay Kumar is Raj Narain's man. The general secretary is Z.A. Faizan, Bahuguna's man. But Vinay Kumar's faction does not apparently have much support and for the time being most of the YJ members are backing Yadav. But there were interesting sidelights. K.C. Tyagi (of Suresh-Sushma fame), who hails from the erstwhile Yuva Lok Dal, Charan Singh's youth corps, initially joined the Vinay Kumar faction at Bhopal and even got into a brawl with Yadav's men. On the last day of the convention, however, he was instruc-



Sangharsh Samiti members arrested in front of the Patna Secretariat during the Bihar Movement in 1974 : is youth power effective only when it has to rebel against the system ?

THE MAJOR YOUTH AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS



ted over telephone through a local minister, Ramashankar, by Charan to join Yadav. And Tyagi meekly went over! Patronage, godfatherism, manipulation—call it what you will.

But there are bright patches too, insists Vijay Pratap, once the president of the Delhi unit of the Samajwadi Yuvajana Sabha and even now a permanent invitee on the national committee of the Yuva Janata. "In the Delhi YJ unit," he says, "the members unanimously passed a resolution unseating general secretary Rajkumar Jain because he held a Janata Party post. Even his erstwhile socialist friends voted against him. On another occasion, the very people whom K.C. Tyagi and Rajen Chowdhury—the former YLD men—had nominated opposed their stance on the Kisan Rally last year. Isn't this unanimous action on ideological questions?"

The Yuva Janata, therefore, has taken up the anti-RSS campaign with gusto. Very little else seems to be forthcoming from its leadership. Its only slogan now is 'Sangh se sangharsh': the struggle against the RSS.

In Bihar, under the leadership of the Lohia Vichar Manch's Kishan Patnaik, a splinter group broke away from the YJ and formed the Bihar Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti (BCYSS) in February this year. Prior to this, in November 1978, the Bihar YJ and other youth activists who had participated in the 1974 movement had gathered at Sarai to discuss the direction the YJ was taking. They gave the national YJ leadership till January 31 this year to 'remedy matters'. Matters were not remedied, nor were the Sarai resolutions acknowledged. And so the break-away occurred. The BCYSS's president is Nitish Kumar, and its general secretary is Raghupati. The Sangharsh Samiti is distinct from JP's Sangharsh Vahini, which is led by Anil Prakash. Even now, the

Lohia Vichar Manch operates separately and consists of those Socialists who regard the Janata as a 'transitional arrangement'!

The tragedy of the Yuva Janata, says Praval Maitra, who works for *Panchajanya* magazine, is that it is ridden by both proxy politics and the Janata's *khichdi* politics. And the Bihar split is significant, because a new 'Bihar movement' against the new RSS-dominated ministry in that state is soon to start. It may not be too far-fetched to guess that if there is an internal revolt against the Janata's meandering policies, it may be initiated by the leaders of the Sangharsh Samiti, who have gathered rich experience during the 1974 movement.

While discussing the Yuva Janata, we must not forget the Janata Yuva Morcha, the 'official' youth wing of the ruling party. It is led by Kalraj Mishra, also an MP. And the JYM is patently loaded with RSS or pro-RSS elements. Yuva Janata men scornfully refer to it as yet another arm of the Sangh. Like the YJ, the JYM has also not emerged with any earth-shaking plan of action. In fact, the various youth bodies that can vaguely be termed to tilt towards the ruling party seem to have made it their mission to achieve as little as possible, to concentrate solely on getting a share of the goodies that come with power. Only the ABVP appears to be pursuing an independent policy: in contrast with the other bodies, it is anxious to strengthen its cadres and extend its grass-roots influence.

Programmes and militancy

"Which youth movement can go forward if it does not sound a little bit militant?" said Ambika Soni, looking back at the day in Gauhati when she had



Although Sanjay and his men disclaim political ambitions, YC(I) members provided very visible muscle power during the rally organised by the Congress(I) in Delhi on May 16.

called upon the Congress President to involve more YC members in decision-making. But militancy ought to be channelled the correct way, and 99 times out of a hundred it isn't. Vijay Pratap has another theory. "People automatically assume that youth is revolutionary," he says. "It depends on how youth is socialised; they can sacrifice more than their elders because of their age. And no youth movement can go forward unless it forgets the distinction between educated and illiterate youth. Students are the apex of the pyramid—unless they team up with the numerically larger and illiterate base, there can be no progress."

That is true to quite an extent. No youth body bothers about that huge body of unlettered youth that fills our countryside to bursting. Youth politics are as elitist as adult politics, and strangest of all, far too much attention is focussed on issues like unemployment doles and a utopian overhauling of the educational system. Or else there are the parent party's obsessions to be fought over.

There is an interesting sidelight to the unemployment dole. In West Bengal people who have

been on the live registers of unemployment exchange (as they are called) for five years or more are now entitled to a monthly dole of Rs 50. Many of these people are reportedly Youth Congress workers and so the Marxist government in that state is assiduously subsidising the very people it hates!

"Militancy, programmes, utter nonsense!" snorts a CPI man. "We must bundle off our urban youth for a two-year compulsory stint in our villages; let them see what kind of nation and what sort of deprived youth they claim to represent. Then they will return quieter and more sincere."

From the history of our youth movements, it is obvious that youth has achieved something only when it has had to *rebel* against something: the pre-Independence role played by young Indians in the freedom movement, and the post-Independence role played by youth in Bihar and Gujarat, are instances. Constructive action, therefore, seems as utopian a goal as a new educational system.

Most damning of all is the fact that most youth bodies have an 'age limit' for membership of 35. Since most of the leaders are either in their late



twenties or early thirties (example: Sanjay Gandhi, who will be 33 in December this year) it stands to reason that they will soon be ineligible for membership. So in the absence of activist cadres for even one youth body it means the only concrete programmes the leaders pursue are those of self-perpetuation. Once legitimate and 'adult' power is achieved, these leaders will either discard their followings or continue to pull strings on their puppets from the wings.

The Youth Congress(S)

In discussing Sanjay at such length we cannot ignore his counterpart Das Munshi and his YC(S). From most accounts it looks as though Das Munshi has crossed the 35 barrier, but it does not really matter; he is president of the YC(S). For one and a quarter years after the last Congress split, the YC(S) did not do anything at all. Das Munshi spends only one week every month in Delhi. When I asked his general secretary, Harcharan Singh Josh, why he spent three weeks every month in West Bengal, he

said, "There is a lot of foreign infiltration into the eastern and north-eastern states, and Mr Das Munshi is anxious to strengthen both the YC(S) and the Congress(S) in that region"! Early in May, Josh finally summoned a desultory press conference, where he presented the YC(S) plan of action.

The Indian Youth Congress, as it calls itself, came into existence officially on 20 May 1978 when Swaran Singh nominated its office-bearers. Prior to that, as a counter to Sanjay's Congress Youth Forum, Das Munshi as chairman had formed the Young Socialists; Bhim Singh from Jammu & Kashmir was its president and Josh its general secretary. Now, Josh claims the IYC has 5 lakh members, and yet they are involved in a membership drive which will end on July 31. Late in April, the IYC held a national council meeting, which expressed satisfaction at the ending of the unity talks with the Congress(I) on March 12, viewed Harijan atrocities and the emergence of the RSS as a strong organisation with concern, condemned the Freedom of Religion Bill, urged banning of RSS shakhas, welcomed revolt against Sanjay Gandhi in the Congress(I) and would-be defectors from there, and said the IYC "shall strive in its effort to forge a united youth movement consisting of democratic and progressive elements against the organised fascism of the RSS and the Sanjay caucus."

No matter that the IYC is divided sharply between two camps: one backed by K.C. Pant and the other by Chandrajit Yadav. No matter that the IYC's all-India convenor Anand Vardhan (a Pant man) who was sent in a delegation to West Germany, applied for a working permit there, settled down to work there, and sent in his resignation from there! No matter that Das Munshi's 'organising secretary' is a middle-aged man named Rati Ram Bhatti. The IYC barrels on with its programme.

It decided to observe May 30 as Black Day against the Janata's misrule. From June 8 to 10, the IYC said it would organise a National Training Camp in Kashmir (where else, in this heat?) and one-day state conventions on the present political situation and unemployment problem in Delhi, Bhopal, Patna, and Jaipur in late May and early June. "The conventions will be addressed by the Leaders of the Congress Party", said Josh's pamphlet, proving the point that Party Leaders were the IYC's leaders too.

What about the IYC's student wing, the NSUI? The NSUI's acting president is Uday Pratap Singh, and its general secretaries are Radha Kanta Singh, Anil Dutt Kaushik and Satish Verma. The NSUI's candidate, Hari Shankar, ended the ABVP's stranglehold on Delhi University Students Union posts when he won the presidentship in August last year; it was a victory of sorts, because all the remaining three DUSU posts went to the Janata Vidyarthi Morcha, another RSS-backed front. In June 1978, the NSUI begged for the abolition of entertainment tax in all cinemas so that students could see as many films as they wished to in the summer! "If the Janata government cannot provide students with work during vacations the least it can do is to provide them with inexpensive entertainment," said the NSUI's hilarious press note. Later, of course, Hari Shankar organised the enormously unsuccessful 'personality contest' in Delhi University; small matter that the only other occasion on which DUSU had hit the headlines was when the Delhi Transport Corporation announced that it would have to spend Rs 7 lakhs in repainting 700 buses disfigured by posters and paint

during the union elections. Youth power either burns buses or disfigures them—it is all the same.

The ABVP's grassroots politics

I met Arun Jaitley, the president of the Delhi unit of the ABVP and one of its oldest members, at the lawyers' canteen at the Tis Hazari courts. From Monday till Friday Jaitley is a practising lawyer, and seems to be pursuing that career with singlemindedness: I had to wait for an hour before meeting him because a witness in a case Jaitley was involved in spoke through the lunch hour and could not be interrupted.

The ABVP, which was formed in 1949, is not a student organisation, says Jaitley, but an educational one. "Rather than embark on a political career we have preferred to remain in the ABVP," says Jaitley, who is also the All-India Secretary of the organisation. There is no link with the RSS, he insists, but the ABVP only broadly represents a national school of thought that is parallel to the RSS line. Organisationally and ideologically it is independent of the RSS, he goes on. Membership? Over 6 lakhs, Jaitley says confidently. But not every member is an activist: the ABVP is a "good, cadre-based" organisation with a good team of workers and educational institutions. "During the Emergency, there were more of ABVP workers offering satyagraha and operating underground than from any other youth body," he says.

In early 1977, soon after his release from prison, Jaitley wanted to form a Lok Tantrik Yuva Morcha, bringing together various youth organisations. "Our workers mobilised youth in support of the Janata Party and we drew away after the party came to power because we believe that we ought to be a watchdog organisation monitoring public and social activities and not clamour for power and positions. Not a single ABVP member applied for or contested on Janata tickets for assembly elections. I myself was asked to join the first working committee of the Janata but turned it down." This isn't exactly true because another source claims that Jaitley actually joined the Janata's national executive and was pressured into quitting that post by the RSS.

The ABVP claims that it was formed with two objectives: the organisation of the educational community for the solution of various problems facing it and the involvement of the educational community in the overall task of national reconstruction. It has three kinds of activities: constructive, representational and agitational. Almost all ABVP centres (there are reportedly 250 all over India) run book banks in local universities; from 2 October 1977 each ABVP unit has adopted a village or a slum and is reportedly doing regular social work. The ABVP also organises the 'Student Experience in Inter-state Living', whereby children from the north-eastern states stay with families of ABVP members in Bombay and Poona and complete their education (no one can really verify whether this is happening, and if so how many such children have benefited so far).

Each state unit of the ABVP has to collect its own finances—and each unit maintains 'perfect' accounts. There are altogether around 90 fulltime ABVP workers, and they are largely responsible for gathering funds, which come from small donors, the proceeds of souvenirs that are brought out twice

every year by each unit, and membership fees. "No political parties or big business houses ever give the ABVP any donations," says Jaitley firmly. "Of course, a weak unit may be tempted to run after political sympathisers—but we quickly discourage such moves."

Until recently, the ABVP actively contested students' union and students' council elections in various universities. But in 1977 it decided not to contest any such elections "for some time" so that it could try to advocate a constructive approach for the whole student movement and refrain from getting involved in the "misadventures of student activism". "Now we are organisationally stronger," says Jaitley. "We have also decided to resist joining the Janata Party; instead of the politics of power we will strive for the politics of change and reform."

Agitationally, the ABVP has been carrying on a 'continuous campaign' for an improvement in the educational system: on March 6 this year it presented 'specific proposals' for educational changes which included a gradual increase in budget allocations for education to 10 per cent of the national income, curtailment of wasteful expenditure in education and usage of Indian languages, to P.C. Chunder, in a petition reportedly signed by 7,83,872 students.

The ABVP president is Professor Bal Apte, 45 years old and also an active RSS member. When I asked Jaitley about this, he said, "Professor Apte's links with the RSS are younger than his links with ABVP. In any case Apte's or Kohli's objective is not to enter the Rajya Sabha, unlike other so-called



Rallies, speeches, banners, flags—these are the staples of youth politicians.

youth leaders."

That the RSS is not infiltrating educational institutions is a tall story as facts prove that even in the DUSU elections last year, the RSS actively backed, through its coordinator M.L. Khurana, the campaigns of the three Janata Vidyarthi Morcha candidates who bagged all other posts except that of president. Hundreds of teachers in Delhi University are RSS members or sympathisers. Subramaniam Swamy was until recently chairman of S.P. Mookerji College. Other RSS members/sympathisers who head college boards are K. Narendra (editor, 'Pratap' and 'Vir Arjun' and chairman of Bhagat Singh College); I. D. Mahajan (a very senior member and chairman of Vivekananda College); Kanwar Lal Gupta (chairman of Shivaji College); Vijay Goel (chairman of Satyavati College); and K. N. Malik (special correspondent, 'Times of India' and chairman, Maitreyi College).

The SFI and its 'politics of involvement'

The Students Federation of India (SFI) is the CPM's student wing, and the Democratic Youth Federation (DYF) is its youth wing. Strangely, until 1970 the CPM had no student or youth wings, and most of the current SFI and DYF members were then in the All India Students Federation or the All India Youth Federation (both of which are CPI bodies). The SFI held its first conference in 1970. Why did it take so long for the SFI to form? (the Communists had split in 1964). Because by the late 1960s, says Prakash

Karat, the SFI president until February this year, "our people found that the AISF no longer was willing to confront the Congress government. Between 1964 and 1970 we tried to put matters right but it was difficult to put out a clear line of struggle. So in 1970 we constituted SFI units in nine states; only now we have formed an all-India organising committee."

At the SFI national conference at Patna in February, M.A. Baby of Kerala was elected president and Nepal Bhattacharya of West Bengal the general secretary, and Prakash Karat 'retired', in order to become a full-time CPM party worker.

Unlike other communist parties, says Karat, who was once the president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU), the SFI did not want to be a 'young Communists league'. "We are interested in modelling ourselves on a trade union," he says, "and fighting for reform in education and in employment." The SFI has been agitating for three reforms: the right to work (and an unemployment dole), a lowering of the voting age to 18 and sweeping educational reforms. Now Karat is pushing his most ambitious plan. "Increasingly our understanding is that it's necessary for student and youth movements to come together," he says, sounding the first sensible note in my series of meetings with youth leaders, and goes on to present his plan.

On May 8 Karat and Baby met with representatives of the AISF and the Yuva Janata and got them to agree that the three bodies ought to come together at a national convention in Delhi in July and demand that the government concede the three demands listed earlier. "It will be on an anti-communal and anti-



A crowd is soon assembled traffic held up, and headlines made: the cause of youth has been satisfactorily served.

authoritarian platform," says Karat. He is not underestimating the obstacles, though—there is bound to be disagreement on ideological grounds.

The SFI has representatives in the presidencies of 13 universities now and a total membership of around 4 lakhs. The membership fee is a mere 25 paise annually—5 paise come to the centre and 20



Arun Jaitley of ABVP



Lalit Maken, DPCC(I) general secretary who is leading the revolt against Sanjay Gandhi.



Jagdish Tytler, altogether a Sanjay man and president of the Delhi Youth Congress(I)

paise are distributed among the state units. "Our concept of membership is different from other youth bodies," says Karat. "We cannot underestimate the ABVP's base. Before the Emergency the SFI dominated only two university unions: at JNU and at the Agricultural University, Hissar. Now even two universities in Kerala, traditionally Congress-dominated, have been wrenched by the SFI from the Kerala Students Union—in alliance with the AISF."

Large sections of India's youth who were mobilised against the Emergency are now disillusioned with the new government's performance, and with the YC(I) trying to revive itself with its unlimited financial support, the SFI is trying to turn the tide against Congress opportunism. "There is an incipient fascist tendency in Sanjay's YC," says another SFI leader, "and YC members have been used as storm-troopers to intervene in mass struggles—in Kerala, Congress radical rhetoric prior to the split was even more fiery than ours. The country's left wings have neglected students for too long, and this has allowed the Congress to establish a strong base in Kerala. Now we have begun to fight their base."

Between 1970 and 1977, according to the SFI, many of its student members in West Bengal had to quit college—they had been marked, "all in the name of CPM terrorism". In West Bengal, Das Munshi and his other henchman, Lakkhi Kanta Bose, provided "intellectual cover" for the YC's goondaism, says the

Youth Revolt Against Sanjay

THERE is a revolt against Sanjay brewing within the ranks of the YC(I), and it is led by two of its Delhi leaders: Lalit Maken and Prem Swaroop Nayyar. In a series of meetings with them, I discovered the extent of resentment that exists against Sanjay. Maken was an active student leader in college, and in 1971 Das Munshi nominated him general secretary of the DPYC. Between 1973 and February 1976 he was president of the DPYC, and quit that post in protest against Ambika Soni's nomination to the presidency of the all-India YC. After the Emergency Maken was first general secretary of the Congress Youth Forum and then when the YC(I) was reconstituted in June 1978 its general secretary under Ramachandra Rath for a brief while. He quit this post in protest against P. S. Nayyar being replaced as the Delhi president by Jagdish Tytler. Today Maken is the general secretary of the DPCC(I), but is sure he will soon be ousted from that post and perhaps suspended from party membership.

Tytler, it appears from various sources, was a nonentity in YC politics until 1976 when Sanjay suddenly began propelling him upward. He has scarcely any support among YC(I) workers, and his dictatorial methods have alienated even sincere ones among them. "The May 1 rally was a good example of Tytler's fictional support," says Maken. "Only 1,500 people turned up for it after a lot of cajoling. Half were from outside Delhi. 25,000 had been 'expected'. Tytler had spent Rs 50,000 on the rally's organisation, printing posters and hiring 200 buses!"

On April 15, under Maken's initiative, Nayyar and three other DPYC(I) office-bearers, Sohan Lal, Chattar Singh and Pratap Singh called a meeting at Pyare Lal Bhavan to discuss the Janata's 'anti-people budget' and the 'Black Bill'—the Special Courts Bill. 1,500 delegates reportedly attended it. Towards the end, the delegates apparently began to discuss the organisation, expressed a total lack of confidence in Tytler's leadership, and unanimously elected Nayyar the new DPYC(I) president. Next day Rath suspended Nayyar and his three colleagues.

"Rath has no authority to suspend us," says Nayyar. "There is no constitution he can go by, and even his authority is questionable. He was nominated the YC(I) president only because he acted as Sanjay's hit man against Nandini Satpathy in Orissa."

Maken is equally indignant. He describes how he and Nayyar have gone to jail many times for Mrs Gandhi, how Nayyar's father, who works in the NDMC, has been harassed on account of his son's support for Mrs Gandhi, and how he was the first person to be suspended from the (unsplit) Congress in August 1977 when he snatched away Brahmananda Reddi's mike at a DPCC conference to which Mrs Gandhi had not been invited. "When Mrs Gandhi, in the early days after her election defeat, was ignored by other Congressmen, I was among

SFI leader, and even now Kamal Nath, Sanjay's friend in that state, openly flaunts his hoodlum friends every time he goes to court. As for the Yuva Janata, the SFI man says laughingly, it can never become the Janata's stormtrooper unit because of the anarchy that exists within its ranks.

"There is a vast reservoir of elements prepared to fight authoritarianism in the country," says Karat, "and even if they are disgusted with the Janata they won't fall into fascist arms. And we must mobilise

these elements." The SFI sees a dangerous similarity between the YC(I)'s slogan of 'youth power' and the ABVP's slogan of 'chhatra shakti'. The SFI is strongest in West Bengal, Kerala, Punjab, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Tripura and to some extent in Bihar. On August 9 this year (which will be the 37th anniversary of the Quit India movement) the SFI plans to issue a joint call along with the AISF and the Yuva Janata for a nationwide mobilisation for a demonstration in front of parliament for its demands. The SFI



Village youth like these are usually ignored by the mostly urban-based youth bodies; and yet when there has to be mass agitation like in the Bihar movement, the rural young are sought to be dragged willy-nilly into the ranks.

central office shifted to Delhi from Calcutta last month in furtherance of its new 'national' outlook. There are 59 members in the SFI's central executive and 13 office-bearers in its secretariat.

The AISF's ideological muddle

The All India Student Federation and its youth counterpart the AIYF are both affiliated to the CPI. Even here, there is barely any programme, only a compulsion to participate in as many university union elections as possible. There is also a vertical split in the ranks, along pro- and anti-Dange lines. At its last national conference, held on February 20 this year at Ludhiana, Atul Kumar Anjan was 'elected' president. The AISF then decided to launch a countrywide movement from the next academic session (1979-80) to free "the educational system from the clutches of capitalistic and communal forces". The AISF claims a membership of 5 lakhs. It also claims that it is fighting for basic changes in education and the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy. Naturally, too, it is out to battle the RSS and its communalism.

The AISF, if its office-bearers are correct, is the oldest youth body in the country: it was founded in 1936. Jawaharlal Nehru presided over its first conference. One of its more active members in Delhi was a JNU student named R.G. James, who was also the president of the university's unit of AISF. In late 1978 James quit both the AISF and the CPI in disgust at its "devious politics". James joined the CPI in 1973 and in August 1977 was elected to the AISF's Delhi executive committee. During the Emergency, James fought against the JNU's 'Court of Honour', set up to enforce the draconian rules clamped on the campus by Vice-Chancellor B.D. Nag Chaudhuri, when it gave Ashokalata Jain (presently the General Secretary of the Delhi unit of the SFI) a show-cause notice for circulating a pamphlet criticising the Emergency.

During the Emergency the JNUAISF president was Gyan Prakash, and his general secretary was Kamal Mitra Chennoy. When Chennoy published a pamphlet supporting the boycott of the Court of Honour, he was suspended, and immediately thereafter, to the dismay of his colleagues in the AISF, went off to the Imphal centre of JNU and became a teacher there. One year later, he was back in JNU, on a teaching fellowship; and although he is an employee of the university, he is also the present vice-president of the JNU students union. Chennoy's wife has also got a job in JNU's Centre for Soviet and East European studies. "How can there be any integrity in youth bodies if we have renegades like Chennoy?" asks another disgusted AISF member.

The AISF's all-India general secretary, Amarjit Kaur, contested only one election in her entire career (which has reportedly been bereft of any ideological commitment and full of 'intellectual contradictions') when she stood for the DUSU general secretaryship in 1974. She lost by 150 votes.

There has been open and irritating interference in AISF affairs by CPI bosses, particularly by its Delhi secretary Prem Sagar Gupta, alleges James. T.A. Francis, general secretary of the AISF during the Emergency (who had been arrested in February 1977) was summarily removed from his post by Gupta. Until 1972 the AISF secretary was Makhan Lal, who is now the assistant secretary of the Karol Bagh district CPI. Makhan Lal is the son-in-law of Nand Lal Gupta, a member of the Delhi CPI executive committee and

general secretary of the Indo-GDR Friendship Society. Makhan Lal was succeeded by Feroz Chandra, whose parents Ramesh and Perin Chandra are both senior leaders of the CPI, and who has now joined the films in Bombay (apparently because his girlfriend was at the FTII in Poona!). "This is the sort of commitment we have," says James.

The AISF's woes, James says, are directly attributable to the "spring chickens" who lead the CPI today, and who were all members of the communist Party of Great Britain under Rajni Palme-Dutt. These "spring chickens", says James, have never had any grassroots support in India and they have all been foisted on the Central Committee of the CPI. "Parliamentarians like Bhupesh Gupta have all never dared to stand for assembly or Lok Sabha elections," says James. "They have all come in comfortably into the Rajya Sabha."

Whether one accepts James's thesis or not (he is regarded as a 'defector' in CPI circles) there is no doubt that the AISF and the AIYF have hardly any support and that their so-called leaders, who have to be approved by the CPI leaders, are interested in nothing except upward mobility (into the party echelons) and in sponsored trips to the Soviet Union or its satellites.

There is also a student organisation called the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) whose only pockets of strength are in West Bengal and Kerala. The SUCI, however, is very good at publicity: its posters and graffiti can be seen plastered all over town. The only leader of any stature it had was the "late lamented" Shibdas Ghosh, euphemistically called "Asia's Lenin". The SUCI calls itself the "only genuine left organisation in India".

The future

We have so far had a good look at all the leading student and youth organisation in the country. Does any of them have the potential to take up issues that affect the nation's youth as a whole? Is any one of them free of the debilitating influence of parent-party politics and divisions? "None of the youth bodies have the capacity or potential to develop a democratic, socialist society," says Vijay Pratap. "But I am optimistic about the emergence of democratic concepts and I am sure that there will finally be a 'revolution through evolution'."

But as long as there are no truly democratic norms in youth bodies, and as long as travesties of sincerity like the nomination of their office-bearers by senior politicians continue, no change can occur. There is no doubt at all that youth politicians develop rapidly into ambitious and unscrupulous replicas of their 'mentors' in the parent party: the ultimate goal, as we have seen, is power. And in this our youth politicians seem to fit Aldous Huxley's view that "A majority of our young people seem to develop mental arteriosclerosis forty years before they get the physical kind."

Can there be a unification of our youth bodies under one umbrella organisation with members from different political backgrounds and elected office-bearers? Such a unified body might achieve much more than what has been achieved in 32 years of independence. But it does not seem possible, although the SFI is trying to grope its way towards a semblance of such unification with other bodies. For the present, India's youth politicians seem to have succeeded in sharing not power, but powerlessness. [N]