

Not for publication

Juk

June 19, 1967.

Dear Shri Ajoy Mukherjee,

We were distressed at your negative reaction in your letter to the Prime Minister to the proposal that a study team of Members of Parliament belonging to all parties should pay a visit to the Naxalbari area in North Bengal to observe and study the situation there and report back to Parliament on the conditions in that strategically important part of India.

The suggestion was made by some Opposition groups, among them the Samyukta Socialist Party and the Praja Socialist Party, both constituents of the Coalition government in West Bengal. In fact, some of us had suggested a mixed representative delegation of both the Members of Parliament as well as the West Bengal Assembly.

It seems that an impression has been created in the minds of some people that this was some kind of a parliamentary investigation or an inquisition or a witch-hunt directed against the State Government. It is nothing of the kind.

We are all aware that our Federal Constitution demarcates the legislative and executive powers of the States and the Centre in very clear terms. We have no desire, nor was it ever suggested, that Parliament should encroach on the powers of the West Bengal Assembly or the West Bengal Government. We would like to remove this misapprehension and state emphatically that the proposal has not been made with a view to interfering with the rightful domain of the States or intervening in matters that fall within the jurisdiction of the States.

A distinction must, however, be made between encroachment on the legislative and executive domain of the State, which is undesirable, and the inherent right of Parliament as the nation's supreme representative assembly to send teams or delegations to any part of the country to study the situation and report back to Parliament.

It cannot be maintained that normal conditions exist in the Naxalbari part of Darjeeling district. Nor can it be denied that certain extremist elements have taken to violence and sought to create a sense of fear and insecurity among the people there. In the Statesman of 17th June, 1967, there are reports that the villagers in areas where the S.S.P. and Forward Bloc have some following have decided to take the arms in self-defence. We have also seen statements of certain West Bengal Ministers threatening dire action against the anarchist elements which persist in disturbing the peace. We are also aware that the Council of the C.P.I., a constituent of the United Front, have in a statement expressed their disapproval of the activities of some adventurist elements operating in that area. As for your own partymen, we have read reports in which their anxiety over the situation in Naxalbari has been very clearly reflected. In short, the situation is extraordinary and, while we do not deny the right of the State Government to deal with the situation in the area, we feel that Parliament cannot ignore the existence of these abnormal conditions.

After all, this area is strategically important for India's security. This narrow neck which connects North Eastern India with the rest of the country is a vital link in India's defence system. Besides, the happenings in Naxalbari also have a bearing on Tribal Welfare about which Parliament is naturally much concerned. When there were disturbances in Bastar last year, a predominantly Adivasi area, we not only raised this question in Parliament but successfully asserted our right to raise a discussion. It is not denied by anybody, that in the Naxalbari disturbances, several Adivasis have lost their lives. Members of Parliament are naturally interested in finding out the causes that led to these disturbances and in having a look at the problem of the landless people, tea garden workers, poor peasants, share-croppers and the like.

We would like to point out that the proposal was only for sending a fact-finding mission and not a regular Committee of Parliament. The study team was to be representative in character and was to operate with the full co-operation of the State Government. Our object was to prevent a situation developing in which the Central Government might feel called upon to invoke the Emergency provisions of the Constitution. We wanted to be useful and helpful, and we thought that the visit of M.Ps to the Naxalbari area and the submission by them of a detailed report to Parliament while helping to obviate the necessity for Central intervention under the Emergency provisions of the Constitution, would at the same time help the State Government to initiate corrective action from within. The visit of a representative mission and the placing of its findings before Parliament and a discussion on them in both the Houses would have had a restraining influence on all concerned including the extremist elements which are seeking to create trouble in that area.

Parliament is the custodian of the nation's territorial integrity and it cannot ignore the threats that the Chinese pose to our Northern frontiers. We, therefore, thought that a representative delegation of Members of Parliament would be welcomed by the State Government. It goes without saying that such a mission would, before undertaking its task, have paid a visit to you and other Ministers of the West Bengal Government and heard their point of view as well as studied the steps outlined by them to meet the situation there.

We hope that you will reconsider the matter in which case we have no doubt the Speaker of the Lok Sabha will be pleased to nominate, in consultation with the Rajya Sabha Chairman, a really representative and responsible group to go there and study the conditions that have arisen.

We trust that in view of this explanation, you will withdraw your objection to the sending of an M.Ps delegation to Naxalbari and we shall be glad to have an early reply.

Yours sincerely,

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