

FROM THE EDITOR

FIVE GOLD BRICKS A DAY

Recently there has been several strikes by different sections of the paid and organised employees—from dock workers to university teachers—generally ending up in a "victory"! The victors have congratulated themselves and we also congratulate them. But two puzzling questions arise when we try to evaluate such victories in a broader perspective.

Question One concerns primarily the government and secondly all of us. The demand of a section of

employees is either legitimate or illegitimate. If legitimate, why should it be necessary for them to flex

their muscles and "win" what is due to them? If illegitimate, why should the government, the custodian

of the country's interest and resources, yield to the pressure? What about those who are not in a position to shriek, shout and bring things to a stand-still? Let us not gloss over the truth with any euphemism: all organised strikes, *gheraos*, *rastarokos*, *bandhs*, are shows of muscle power. By describing these modern institutions with as crude a phrase as muscle power we do not deny their ends their legitimacy. But as means, these are continuation of the primitive practice of getting something done with violence, though ironically and farcically, the organisers often call these practices non-violence, to add insult to the injury already done to the public. ,

Question Two concerns the 'victors' as well as the people in general.

In some parts of India there is a proverb to this effect: a villager in ancient times learnt that in Lanka a labourer receives his remuneration in terms of gold and that the minimum pay is five gold bricks a day. In those days it was not easy to reach the island. The villager used all his ingenuity and resources to manage a trip there and was delighted to get a job right after alighting from the boat. At the end of the day, he was, indeed, paid five gold bricks. He was thrilled. He had spent months in travelling and was awfully tired. He decided to take rest for a couple of days before resuming work. Also, he needed a haircut badly. He went to a barber. Imagine the shocking process of his disenchantment that started with the barber demanding one gold brick for his fee! The villager had by then finished eating the food he had brought with him from beyond the sea. After a dip in the river, he went to a hotel and ate a good meal. Alas, the remaining four gold bricks were gone to meet the dinner bill. Swimming, sailing and trudging, at last he was back at square one, his native home, in the process earning some invaluable experiences which, he hoped, will benefit others.

We do not know how many of his contemporaries benefited by his experience, but the posterity seems to have remembered it only as a folktale, ignoring the commonsense but mature comment on our social and economic conduct inherent in it.

Now, how many of the organised unions and associations care to see that the fruits of their struggle would be really fruitful? Once the officials of a state secretariate, after a prolonged battle, got a ten per cent increment in their total pay. The announcement of their victory was made at 4 P. M. By 5 P. M., the price of practically every commodity the officials would have needed buying on their way home had gone up by ten per cent. This was prominently reported in the local press. But there was no news of the employees union questioning the traders what upheaval in country's commercial situation had obliged them to raise their prices during 4 P.M. and 5 P.M.

The fool's paradise in which we live seems to be growing more and more fortified day by day. The government must wait till the sleeves are unrolled to bare the full muscle and then bow to the age-old principle of might is right. The strikers never question their own contributions to the overall deterioration in country's economic and other situations made through their insincerity or

obstructive, delaying, go-slow and other actions and lack of actions. Their vision does not go beyond an inflated numerical trophy. ,

Only if a part of the energy spent by unions and associations to secure the deceptively dazzling trophy would go to other issues—to bring about some social, civic awareness among the people, to check corruptions and injustice around them!

IMMORTALITY ON A BAMBOO TREES

Psychologist Otto Rank thinks that man's urge to immortalise himself finds expression through four major channels: he develops a belief in the soul's immortality; he hitches his wagon to the star of an ideology that he knows will survive him; he tries to leave behind him a great deed or work of art that should keep his memory alive; or, at the most minimum, he leaves behind him offspring and is satisfied that his physical or mental image will continue to be there even when he is no more!

Had Otto Rank moved about in India, he would have discovered a fifth channel for securing immortality — through disfiguring monuments of antiquity by inscribing one's name on it — or often two names if it is a mutually loving pair or couple visiting the site.

With how much jolly abandon we carve— in the course of an hour's picnic amidst the ruins — our names and even the names of our villages and Post Offices on an ancient cave or on the chest and arms of a fresco or a statue over which its maker had poured his precious year and devotion some centuries ago, without in any way trying to tag his own name to it!

Monuments declared preserved are lately spared of this scourge but those that are still at the mercy of the picnickers are still victims of such vandalism. On a recent visit to such a place of monuments on a hill, I was amazed to see the propensity for name-carving spilling over to the bamboo trees around the shrines and the hallowed rocks.

Will some psychologists study this behaviour and suggest some remedy?